

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Jason, Son of Jason

by
J.U. Giesy

Sequel to
"The
Mouthpiece
of Zitu"



10¢ PER
COPY

APRIL 16

BY THE YEAR \$4.00

**Was
\$100**

Before
the War

**Now
\$64**



**SAVE
\$36**

*A Finer
Typewriter
at a Fair
Price*

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AFTER FREE TRIAL**

Not a cent in advance. No deposit of any kind. No obligation to buy. The coupon is all you need send. The Oliver comes to you at our risk for five days free trial in your own home. Decide for yourself whether you want to buy or not. If you don't want to keep the Oliver, simply send it back at our expense. If you do agree that it is the finest typewriter, regardless of price, and want to keep it, take over a year to pay at the easy rate of only \$4 a month.

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Note the two-way coupon. It brings you an Oliver for free trial or our catalog and copy of our booklet "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy."

Canadian Price, \$82

The OLIVER Typewriter Company
734 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

**THE OLIVER
TYPEWRITER CO.,**
734 Oliver Typewriter Bldg.,
Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver Nine for five days free inspection. If I keep it, I will pay for it at the rate of \$4 a month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for.

My shipping point is.....

This does not place me under any obligation to buy. If I choose to return the Oliver, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.
☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name.....

Street Address.....

City..... State.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXXIII

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IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY-ALLSTORY

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Long Instalments of

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CRACKER-JACK

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By George Allan England

WATCH FOR THE APRIL 23, 1921, ISSUE

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

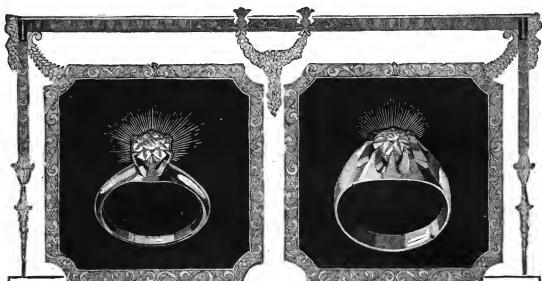
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Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879.



Send the Coupon and We'll Send You a *Lachnite*

THREE THOUSAND years ago alchemists tried to turn base metals into gold. The more ambitious attempted to create a jewel to match the diamond's radiance. For centuries the secret was sought in vain.

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The great diamonds of the world are few. Their history is a history of crime. Yet today a chemist has found a secret by which men can make a stone to rival the Koh-i-noor. It is called Lachnite.

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then—if you or they can tell it from a diamond, send it back and your deposit will be refunded immediately. You are under no obligation to buy.

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Send the Coupon Without a Penny Down

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Harold Lachman Co., Dept. 2274

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Address.....

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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Money Magazine

	LESS RATE	Compli- cation Fee rate
Money's Magazine	\$1.50	\$4.00
Agency-Agency	2.50	5.00
per Week	1.00	2.00
Minimum space four lines.		

May 1st Agency-Agency Forms Close April 23rd.

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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.



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He lives in Maryland and he is just one of thousands of enthusiastic United Y. M. C. A. School students. Though he has not yet completed his home-study Course in Accountancy, he says: "What I have already learned has made it possible for me to earn quite a bit of extra money auditing books for local business concerns outside of my regular hours. So of course I am enthusiastic."

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	Electrician	Foreign Languages

Name and Occupation

Address

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the Y. M. C. A.
Standards in
Correspondence
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Dept. X-164

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American Technical Society, Dept. X-164, Chicago, U. S. A.

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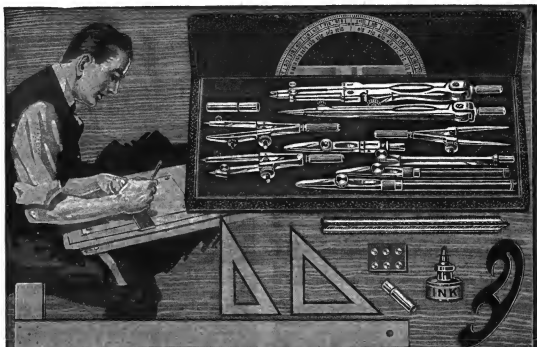
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NUMBER 1

Jason, Son of Jason by J. U. Giesy

Author of "Mimi," "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," etc.

(Sequel to "The Mouthpiece of Zitu")

THOSE who read "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" (ALL-STORY, July 13 to August 10, 1918) and "The Mouthpiece of Zitu" (July 5 to August 2, 1919) will remember that Dr. Jason Croft, having, during his psychic investigations, gained complete control over his astral form, lands while wandering among the planets of outer space upon Palos, one of the spheres of the universe which includes the Dog Star. There he sees and falls in love with Naia, Princess of Tamarizia and, seizing upon the body of a Palosian about to die, he enters into it and in this form, with his advanced knowledge soon makes himself a power on the planet. Several times he returns to his own body on earth; but finally, having won the love of Naia, married her and made himself practical dictator of the planet, he allows his earth body to die and goes to Palos for good. This is the status of things when in the present story, he again gets into communication with his friend (the narrator) Dr. Murray. Of the present story we will only say: "You know that the first one was good and the second better; the third is undoubtedly the best of the trilogy."

CHAPTER I.

NO. 27.

IT was midnight when the night superintendent called and told me No. 27 had died. I rose. The thing was no surprise. I had known it was going to happen. No. 27 had told me so himself. None the less, I went to his room. Routine in the Mental Hospital had nothing to do with that strange secret held in common between myself and the man—that strange state of affairs which had enabled him to predicate his death.

1 A

And yet as I mounted the stairs to the room where his body now lay as a worn-out husk I had none of the feeling which so customarily assails the average mortal in such an hour. To me it was not as though he had died. To my mind in those moments it was no more than the casting aside by the activating spirit of that instrument which for its own ends it had used. The body then was a husk indeed—an emaciated, worn-out thing which, because of our mutual secret, I knew had been kept alive by the sheer force of the spiritual tenant, now removed.

1

I stood looking down upon it, with very much the same sensations one might have in viewing the tool once plied by the hand of a friend. It was nothing more than that really. Jason Croft had used it while he had need of its manipulation, and when his need was accomplished he had simply laid it down.

Jason Croft. Dead? I felt an impulse to smile in most improper fashion. Not at all. The man was not only not dead, but I knew—as positively as I knew I was presently going to leave the room where his dead tool lay on a hospital bed and return to my own quarters—exactly where he had gone.

The statement sounds a bit as though I were better qualified as an inmate than the superintendent of an institution for the care of the insane. And I don't suppose it will help any for me to add that I had seen Jason Croft die before—or that he had informed me on the former occasion, though in less specific fashion, of his approaching end.

That was after he had told me a most remarkable tale, which, in spite of its almost incredible nature, I found myself strongly inclined to believe. It had concerned Croft's adventures on another planet—Palos—one of the spheres in the universe of the Dog Star Sirius, to which he had traveled first by astral projection, but on which he had found means to establish an actual existence in the flesh.

"Unbelievable—can a man be dead and yet live again?" you will say. Well, yes, but— Croft's earth body died just as he had told me it would, and was buried, and time passed, and this patient No. 27 was committed to the institution of which I was the head; and when I went to examine and inspect him, he asked me to dismiss the attendants, and then he spoke to me in the voice of Jason Croft.

More than that, he took up the story of his adventures where he had left off in the previous instance, admitted freely that he had reversed the experiment by which he had gained material existence on Palos, and, driven by the necessity of gaining knowledge for use in his new estate, had deliberately returned to earth. Unbeliev-

able, you will say again. And again I answer:

"Yes—but wait."

Croft was a physician, even as am I. He was a scientific man. In addition he was a student of the occult—the science of the mind, the spirit, and its control of the physical forces of life.

He was an earth-born man. The home in which I first met him contained the greatest private collection of works on the subject I have ever seen. In dying he left them to me—I have them all about me. They are mine. According to his statements and his notations on margins, he had gone so far in his investigations that he could project the astral consciousness anywhere at will. And when I say anywhere, I mean it in the literal sense.

Many men have mastered the astral control on the earthly plane. Croft had carried it to an ultimate degree. He shook off the envelope of the earth atmosphere, led thereto, as he frankly confessed in our conversations, by the attraction of a feminine spirit, though he did not know it at the time, and recognized it only when he first viewed Naia—Princess of Tamarizia—on a distant star.

I had dabbled in the occult to some extent myself. Hence when he spoke of the doctrine of twin souls he had no further need to explain. He alleged that since a child the Dog Star had called him subtly through the years in a way he could not explain. Once having come into her presence, however, he knew that it was Naia—the feminine counterpart of his nature—whose existence on the other planet had called across the void to him. Or so he claimed. And certainly his portrayal of the events on Palos were characterized by a detail that made the atmosphere of his alleged other existence most vividly plain.

To an accomplishment of his mating with her Croft declared that he had done a weirdly wonderful thing. Discovering a Palosian dying of a mental rather than a physical ailment, he had waited until his death occurred, and then appropriated the still physically viable body to himself, as he most comprehensively explained, de-

scribing his act in a scientific way that counseled belief even while staggering the mind.

Over that body he obtained absolute control, exactly as he had gained the same ability with his own. For a time thereafter he led a sort of dual existence, sometimes on Palos, sometimes on earth, until he had fully shaped his plans. Then, and then only, did he voluntarily forsake the mundane life to enter that other and fuller existence he felt that Naia of Aphur could make complete.

I questioned him closely. I was faced by a most amazing thing. I took up first the question of time required in passing from earth to Palos. He smiled and replied that outside the mental atmosphere of man time ceased to exist; that it was man's measure of a portion of eternity, and nothing more, and that he could not use what was non-existent, hence reached Palos as quickly in the astral condition as I could span the gulf between that member of the Dog Star's Pack and earth in thought. All other points I raised he met. Even so it was a good deal of a shock to find my new patient speaking to me with Croft's evident understanding, looking at me out of what seemed oddly like Croft's eyes.

But in the end I was convinced. The man knew too much. He was too utterly conversant with Croft's accomplishments, his aims and ambitions and hopes, to be any one but Croft himself. And, too, he naively explained that it was a poor rule that would not work two ways, and that he had therefore repeated his experiment in gaining a Palosian body when he felt the pressing need of a return to earth.

This night, earlier in the evening, he had bidden me good-by—told me he was going back to Naia, the woman he had dared so much to win, his mate who ere long was to bear him, Jason Croft of Earth, a child. And now—well, now as before, it would seem he had kept his word. Jason Croft was dead *again*.

Is it any wonder that I felt that strange, almost amused desire to smile? Dead! Why, Croft, in so far as I knew him, could practically laugh at death—he was a man who had actually demonstrated, if one be-

lieved his narrative, of course, the truth of the saying that the spirit is the life. He was a man who, because of the needs of his spirit, had deliberately switched his existence from one to the other of two spheres.

I gave what directions were needed for the disposal of No. 27's body, returned to my bed, and stretched myself out. But I didn't sleep all that morning. I buried myself in thought.

Both the narratives to which I had listened—first from the man I knew to be Jason Croft really, secondly from the pitiable wreck he had employed on his return, that worn-out husk which had just died—had produced on me a somewhat odd effect. So clearly had he portrayed the events and emotions which had swayed him in his almost undreamed courtship of the Aphurian princess that I had come to accept the characters he mentioned as actually existent persons, acquaintances almost, just as, in spite of all established precedent, I still regarded Croft himself as alive.

Naia of Aphur—many a time as I listened to his account of their association I had thrilled to the picture of that supple girl with her crown of golden hair, her crimson lips, her violet-purple eyes. So real she had come to seem that I had felt I would know her had I seen her with my physical rather than my mental vision. So real indeed was her mental picture that when he told me she was about to become a mother I had cried out, on impulse, that I wished as a medical man I might attend her—would be glad to see the light in her eyes when they first beheld his, Jason's, child.

And Croft had replied, "Man, I could love you for that," and had flashed me an understanding smile.

So now that he was gone back to her—I lay on my bed unsleeping, and let all he had told me unroll in a sort of mental panorama, dealing wholly with the Palosian world.

Tamarizia! It was into the empire Croft blundered blindly when he went to Palos first—a series of principalities surrounding the shore of a vast inland sea, with the exception of a central state—the seat of the

imperial capitol, embracing the island of Hiranur located in the sea itself, and Nodhur to the west and south. From the central sea a narrow strait led into an outer ocean to the west.

This was known as the Gateway. To the north was Cathur, a rugged, mountainous state, the seat of national learning, in its university at the capitol city of Scira, and east of Cathur was Mazhur, known as the Lost State at the time of Croft's first arrival, because it had been wrested from the empire some fifty years before, in a war with Zollaria, a hostile nation to the north.

Croft, after gaining physical life on Palos, succeeded in winning it back, and in gaining thereby the consent of Naia's father, Prince Lakkon, and her uncle, Jadgor, King of Aphur, to their marriage. It was at that point his narrative had ended first.

East of Mazhur, still hugging the sea and extending into the hinterland of the continent, was Bithur. And Milidhur joined Bithur to the south. West of Milidhur, completing the circle, was Aphur—the name meaning literally "the land to the west" or "toward the sun." Aphur was the southern pillar of the Gateway, ending at the western strait. Nodhur lay south of Aphur, gaining access to the sea by the navigable river Na, on whose yellow flood moved a steady stream of commerce driven by sail and oar until Croft revolutionized transportation by producing alcohol-driven motors. And—if I were to believe his second account—since then he had actually electrified the nation, harnessing mountain streams to generate the force.

Except for the waterways, traffic prior to Croft's innovations was by conveyances drawn by the gnuppa—a creature half deer, half horse, in appearance—or by means of caravans of the enormous beast called sarpelca, resembling some huge Silurian lizard, twice the size of an elephant, with a pointed tail, scale-armored back, camel-like neck, and the head of a marine serpent tentacle-fringed about the mouth.

They were driven by reins affixed to these fleshy appendages, and streamed across the Palosian deserts, bearing huge

merchandise cargoes upon their massive backs.

Indeed, it was a wonderful world into which Croft had projected himself. Babylonian in seeming he had described it to me at first.

North of Tamarizia was Zollaria, inhabited by a far more warlike race. Its despotic government had long cast a covetous eye on the Central Sea, through which and the rivers emptying into its expanse most of the profitable trade lanes were reached. Tamarizia, controlling the western Gateway, had remained master even after the fall of Mazhur, collecting toll from the Zollarian craft on her rivers despite the foothold gained on her northern coast.

East of Tamarizia, beyond Bithur and Milidhur, lay Mazzeria, peopled by a race little above the aborigine in their social life. Tatar-like, the Mazzerians shaved their heads of all save a single tuft of hair, with a most remarkable effect, since the race was blue of complexion and the prevailing color of their hair was red.

Mazzeria, at the time of Croft's incursion into the planet's affairs, was the acknowledged ally of Zollaria, although at peace with Tamarizia. In earlier times, however, numbers of them had been taken captive in border wars and brought to both nations as slaves. These, in so far as Tamarizia was concerned, had later been freed and given citizenship of a degree constituting in their ranks the lowest or serving caste.

Each state was governed by a king, by hereditary succession, in conjunction with a national assembly consisting of a delegate elected by each ten thousand or deckteron of civil population. The occupant of the imperial throne was elected for a period of ten years by vote of the several states.

On Croft's advent, Scythys—a dotard—had been king of Cathur, with his son Kyphallos, the crown prince, a profligate of the worst type, sunk under the charms of Kalamita, a Zollarian adventuress of great beauty, with whom he had plotted the surrender of Cathur to her nation in return for the Tamarizian throne with Kalamita by his side.

Jadgor of Aphur, scenting the danger, had sought to bind the northern prince to Tamarizian fealty through a marriage with Naia, his sister's child. To win Naia and overthrow Zollaria's scheme had been Jason's task. The introduction of both the motor and firearms enabled him to overthrow the flower of Zollaria's hosts on a couple of bloody fields. Victory gained and Zollaria forced to cede Mazhur after fifty years of occupation, Croft prevailed upon the nation to accept a democratic form of government, it being at the end of the Emperor Tamhys's term.

As to the Tamarizians themselves, they were a white and well-formed race. Their women held equal place with men. They believed in the spirit and a future life. They had made no small progress in the sciences and arts. They worked metal, gold being as common as iron on Palos, and copper next.

They tempered the latter and used it in innumerable ways. They wove fabrics of great beauty, one being a blend of vegetable fiber and spun gold. They cut and polished jewels. They had a system of judicaries and courts and a medical and surgical knowledge of sorts.

They were a fairly moral and naturally modest people. Their clothing was worn for protection and ornamentation, rather than for any other purpose. It was donned and doffed as the occasion required, without comment being aroused. In women it consisted, rich and poor, of a single garment falling to the knee or just below it, cinched about the body and caught over one shoulder by a jeweled or metal boss, leaving the other shoulder, arm, and upper chest exposed. To this was added sandals of leather, metal, or wood, held to the foot by a toe and instep band and laces running well up the calves. Men of wealth and soldiers generally wore metal casings, jointed to the sandal to permit of motion and extending upward to the knees. Men of caste wore also a soft shirt or chemise beneath a metal cuirass or embroidered tunic. Save on formal occasions the serving classes wore either a narrow cincture about the loins or, discarding even it, went frankly nude.

Agriculture was highly developed, and they had advanced far in architecture, painting, sculpture. They lavished much time and expense in beautifying their homes. They had well-constructed caravan roads. As Croft had pointed out, he found them an intelligent race waiting, ready to be trained to a wider craft.

And among them, in Naia of Aphur, he believed he had found his twin soul. And he had set about winning her in a fashion such as no other man, I frankly believe, would have dared.

He had won her according to his belief and returned to earth, for the last time, ere he should return and make her his bride. He had told me about it, and he had cast off his earthly body, severing the last tie that held him from his life in Palos. He had died.

He had gone back and found his plans disarranged through the actions of Zud, the high priest at Zitra, the capitol city of Hiranur, where he had left Naia waiting his return in the Temple of Ga, the Eternal Mother—the Eternal Woman, in the Zitran pyramid. Zud, moved by Croft's works and by a story told him by Abbu, a priest who knew Jason's story, had proclaimed him Mouthpiece of Zitu, thereby raising an insurmountable barrier, as it seemed, between him and Naia, since celibacy was one of the tenets of the Tamarizian priests. And yet Croft had won to her, overcoming all obstacles, even winning a second war, with all Mazzeria egged on, her armies officered by Zollarians in disguise this time, ere he gained the goal of his desire.

These things had been told me inside the last few weeks by No. 27—the man who had been committed to the institution for a dissociation of personality, at which he quietly laughed after he had obtained my ear; because he wished to gain contact with me, who knew his former story, and win my aid toward the fulfilment of his mission.

Only he wasn't dead, and I knew it as I lay there with the names of men and women of the Palosian world buzzing in my head. He had gone back to them, now that his work was ended—to Naia, his golden-haired, purple-eyed mate—to Lak-

kon, her father; to Jadgor, her uncle, and Robur his son, governor now of Aphur in the palace where his father, president of the Tamarizian republic, had been king; to Robur, who, like a second Jonathan, had ever been Croft's loyal assistant and friend, and Gaya his sweet and matronly wife; to Magur, high priest of Himyra, the ruling red city of Aphur, by whom Croft and Naia were betrothed; to Zud himself, to whom he had taught the truth of astral control. And I found myself portraying them as Croft had described them, predicating their thoughts and feelings, as I might have done those of any man or woman I knew on earth.

Actually I was projecting my intellect, if not my consciousness, to Palos. The thought came to me. In spirit, if not in perception, I was there for the moment with my friend. In spirit at least I was bridging with little effort billions of actual miles. Thought and spirit and soul. They are strange things. Croft, if I was any judge, had gone back to Naia—and there was I lying, picturing the scene, where she waited for his coming in their home high in the western mountains of Aphur, given to them by Lakkon, a wedding gift, after the war with Mazzeria was won. Croft had gone back to Palos, and here was I picturing the thing in my spirit, as plainly as any earth scene I had ever known.

His body would be lying there, covered with soft fabrics, waiting for its tenant on a couch of the wine-red wood such as the Tamarizians used—or perhaps of molded copper. And Naia—the woman who had given him her life, who carried even now his life within her—would be watching, watching for the first stir of his returning, out of her violet-purple eyes.

Only—I smiled—Croft had told me he could gain Palos as quickly in the consciousness as I could project myself there in my mind—so, by now, that stirring of her strong man's limbs, beneath the eyes of the fair watcher, had occurred, and once more those two were together.

I smiled again.

The picture of that reunion appealed. There was nothing else to it at the instant. For even in my wildest imaginings

I did not in the least suspect what its nearness, its clearness, the vividness of its seeming, might portend.

CHAPTER II.

THE GATEWAY OF LIFE.

NO, even though I myself had delved more or less deeply into occult lore, with a resulting knowledge of the subject that had brought about the sympathetic understanding of all Croft had told me from first to last, I had little or no conception that night of the inward meaning of the distinctness with which I could conjure up the scene of his return to Naia, or to where the ability might lead. Rather, I felt merely that through his narrative of her wooing he had built up within my mental cells a picture of the fair girl now his bride, so clear, so positive in seeming, that to me she appeared no more than a charming personality—a feminine acquaintance, such as one might on occasion meet, no more removed, so far as my feelings of familiarity with her was concerned, than had her residence been not on Palos, but simply across the street. It is so easy to bridge distance in the mind.

I slept after a time, as one will, drifting from continued thought upon one subject into slumber. And I woke with the thought of Croft's weird homecoming still in mind. It stayed with me more or less, too, in the succeeding days.

Naia of Aphur! Oddly I dwelt upon her. Jason himself had told me that she knew me—had actually seen me—that he had brought her to earth more than once in the astral body—had pointed me out to her as the one earth man who knew and believed his story—that she looked upon me as a friend.

The thing seemed some way to establish a sort of personal bond, just as the secret Croft and I had kept between us made me feel toward him as I have never felt toward any other man.

Jason Croft and Naia of Aphur—the interplanetary lovers. It was certainly odd. I knew her, even though I had never seen her, save through the instrumentality of

his description of her, and the resultant picture printed on my mind. Yet I could close my eyes at will and see her, slender, golden haired, with her lips of flaming scarlet, and her violet-purple eyes.

And I knew her home. I could lift it into my conscious perception as a familiar scene. I could imagine her moving about it, young, vibrant, happy, alone or with Croft by her side. I could fancy her bathing in the sun-warmed waters of the private bath in the garden—the gleam of her form against the clear yellow stone of which it was constructed—until she seemed the little silver fish Croft had called her, disporting in a bowl of gold, behind the white, screening, vine-clad walls. Or I could dream of her walking about the grounds, with the giant Canor—the huge, doglike creature she called Hupor, who was at once her pet, her companion, and guard. Distant? Why, she seemed no more distant to me in the days after Croft had gone back to be with her when her time of delivery was come than some fair maid of earth waiting for the coming of her lover across a dividing wall in an adjacent yard.

And yet so blind is the objective mind, that even then I did not suspect I had established a sympathetic chain of interest between the atmosphere of her existence and myself, capable of stretching out to a most peculiar climax in the end. Then, one night something over a month after No. 27 had died and been laid away, I dreamed.

I don't say I thought of it as a dream at the time. Then it was all too seriously, too grippingly, real to seem other than the actual thing. It was only after it was over that I thought of it as a dream—perhaps because, despite the occurrence and all Croft had told me, I was still not fully convinced.

Later—well, that's the story. I'll let it unfold itself.

I went to bed that night and fell asleep. How long I slept I do not know. But a voice disturbed my slumbers after a time. At least it disturbed the restful unconsciousness of my spirit. To this day I am not sure whether or not my body moved.

"Murray—Murray." I heard it, dimly at first, but insistent. It kept repeating

itself over and over. Beyond doubt some one was demanding my attention. I sought to rouse.

"Murray—in the name of Zitu—and Azil—"

I stiffened my attention. It was nothing short of startling to hear those words spoken.

Zitu was God in the Tamarizian language, as I knew, and Azil was the Angel of Life—as Ga was the Virgin Mother. Ga and Azil—the mother and the life-bringer—they were the ones to whom the Tamarizian women most frequently prayed. I gave over my endeavor to waken my sleeping body and lay straining the ears of my spirit to the voice.

It came again. Whoever the speaker was, he seemed to know he had stirred my conscious perception.

"Murray—I need your advice—your counsel. Naia needs you. It's life and death, Murray. You told me you would gladly render her assistance as a physician. Murray—will you come?"

My spirit staggered. It was most amazing. For now I knew that the speaker was Jason Croft.

I knew that he was appealing to me in the name of Zitu and Azil—in the name of motherhood—that he was calling on me as a brother physician, by the oath of my profession—in the name of all that was highest and holiest in life.

I knew that Naia's hour of travail was upon her—and I knew it as clearly as if the thing were taking place somewhere within a neighboring home on earth. I lay and let the knowledge beat in upon me. I recalled in a flash all he had told me concerning medical knowledge on Palos. If some complication in the birth of their child impended, there would be none on that far planet to whom he could turn for aid. He knew more than all the physicians of Palos put together, but—

"Murray!" the voice repeated. "Murray, in the name of God!"

There was a desperate urge—a desperate plaint about it. I reached a decision. I had never married. There was no one dependent upon me. With a strange thrill I realized the fact. If I failed to return from

this strangest of calls to which a medical man was ever bidden, if the body of me were not to be revived, I would be little missed.

So what did it matter? A man—or most men—surely could die but once; and how better than in performing the duty of a physician, in an endeavor to save other life? I recall now that such thoughts flitted swiftly through my brain, and left me ready to dare the venture suggested by Croft's voice, if thereby I might render an intimate service to him and Naia of Aphur, in spirit if not in the flesh.

"Murray!"

Again the agony of a strong man's appeal for all he held dearest in existence.

I think the lips of my sleeping material being must have moved at last. Be that as it may, I know I answered:

"Yes."

And I know Croft sensed my acquiescence, for his response was beating into my consciousness in a flash.

"Then—fix your mind on our home in the western mountains, visualize it, Murray, as I have described it to you. Will your conscious presence within it. I shall be waiting for you. Call up the scene and demand that our will be granted. Think of nothing else."

Save for the directions for reaching to him, the thing was as real as a telephone message, and the assurance that the husband of your patient would be waiting your arrival at his house. But there was about Croft's promise to await my coming a definite note of conviction in my ability to encompass our mutual purpose that aided me most materially in what followed, as I now confess.

He was so seemingly sure that I would not fail them—that what assistance I could render would be granted—that for the time being it overthrew all doubt of success. Too, I had grown so accustomed to thinking of Naia of Aphur as a woman—a palpitant creature of radiant flesh and blood—that the very reality of her seeming robbed somewhat of its weirdness, its cery quality, the fact that I was about to respond in the astral body to an urgent medical call. Consciously then I sought to follow Croft's

directions. I fastened my thought on his Aphurian home.

I strove to exclude everything else from my mind. I brought up the picture of it as a thing at the end of a distant vista, down which I must pass to attain it, and—all at once that picture moved!

I say it moved, because that is how it at first appeared. At all events, it seemed to come toward me with amazing swiftness. For an instant my comprehension faltered, and then I knew. I knew I had gained my purpose—that I was astrally out of my body, even though I had not known the instant when I left it; that I was speeding with incredible rapidity toward the scene into which I had wished to be projected; that darkness was all about me, like an impenetrable wall; that I was like one in an infinite, an interminable tunnel, with the lighted picture I had conjured up at the end.

Then that too faded, dissolved, lost its comprehensive quality, and gave place to more finite detail, and—I was in a room. But it was not strange. I knew it—recognized it instantly, thanks to Croft's previous words.

Its walls were hung with purple hangings shot through with threads of gold. There was a shallow pool of water in its center edged round with white and golden tiles. Beside it on a pedestal of wine-red wood there stood a figure—the form of a man straining upward as for flight, with outstretched arms and uplifted wings, translucent—formed of a substance not unlike alabaster—the shape of Azil.

That too I recognized in a flash, and I seemed to catch my breath. At last I was on Palos! This was Azil, the Angel of Life, before me—poised by the mirror pool in the chamber of Naia of Aphur—ablaze now with the light of many incandescent bulbs in copper sconces against the walls. All this I saw, and became conscious that, as well as light, the chamber was full of life.

Naia of Aphur! She lay before me on a copper-molded couch—and as I turned my eyes upon her, her body beneath the coverings of silklike fabric which veiled yet hardly concealed it, writhed. She moaned

—the anguish of physical suffering set its mark on her beautiful face. Inside its aureole of golden hair it grew drawn, livid, almost alarmingly white.

A woman, of whom two were in attendance, wearing the blue garment embroidered with a scarlet heart above the left bust—the badge of the nursing craft, as Jason had told me—bent and wiped a dew of pain-wrung perspiration from her forehead, speaking in soothing accents the words of which I could not understand. The form of Naia relaxed. She turned her head slightly toward the nurse, and smiled. Yes, smiled. Naia of Aphur smiled out of her anguish in that chamber where Azil watched—Azil, the bringer of life from his mother Ga to the world—and the bravery of it thrilled me.

“Murray!”

I whirled, to behold Jason Croft. Rather, I seemed to see two Jason Crofts, instead of one. One sat in a chair of the same wine-red wood of which the pedestal supporting Azil was formed, in the posture of a man in more than mortal slumber. One floated toward me, ghostlike—a shimmering, shifting, vaporlike semblance of the other as to physical shape. And it was this second Croft that seemed to speak.

I say seemed, because as I recall the episode now I know that communication was in reality by thought transference, although it appeared then to reach the understanding in the form of spoken words. It came over me instantly that Jason had purposely assumed the astral condition to welcome me on my arrival.

I had been too much occupied with my surroundings until then to give thought to my own possible appearance. But as I put out a hand in answer to his single word of greeting I found it no more than a thin, diaphanous cloud. I was even as he was—a nebulous something. Still, that was to be expected. I put it aside and considered the man before me. The features of his astral presence were actually haggard, marked by a suffering plainly mental, yet akin in its way to the lines that contorted Naia of Aphur's face in a mortal wo.

“Croft, in God's name what is the trouble?” I asked as once more a low sound

of smothered anguish came from the couch behind me.

Nor do I think I overshot the mark in declaring what followed to have been the most remarkable medical consultation mortal man might know. He lost no time in explaining the situation. It wasn't his way. He gave me at once an exact and scientific understanding of her condition, ending his narration simply:

“Murray, you know how I love her. I faced the thing as long as I could alone. And then—knowing all that depended on me—I became unnerved, and called for you. There was no one else—and you'd said you'd be glad to attend her. Can you blame me now that you see her?”

I shook my head in negation, turning it for an instant toward the glorious woman shape on the copper bed. “Can she see me? Does she know I am here? Can I speak with her?” I questioned.

“She will sense your presence at least,” Croft said. “I shall revivify my body and draw the chair in which it is sitting close beside the couch. You will sit there, Murray, and I shall tell her you are present, watching, nerving me to my task, before I set to work. She knows I called you, Murray, and now you must help us both. Your brain must use my hands to save her. Come—what do you advise?”

I told him as soon as he had brought his almost panting response to an end. His exposition of the problem we faced had made it dreadfully plain. He heard me out and nodded with set lips.

“I—I'll do it, Murray,” he said. “I—I felt it was the thing, but—without counsel—simply on my own judgment, I could not do it. And—you must coach me. I'll work in a purely subjective condition. That way, even in the body, I'll be able to sense the guiding impulse of your brain. God, man, how I need you! Come.”

The form beside me vanished. The body in the chair flung up its head and rose. It pushed the chair it had occupied quite to the side of the copper couch, and bent to speak of the woman who lay racked with pain upon it. I followed. I sank into the seat provided. Croft straightened. Naia turned her head directly toward me.

I looked for the first time into her violet-purple eyes.

They were clear, steadfast, flawless as a perfect amethyst, though darkened by the ordeal through which she was passing—the eyes of a true woman, high-spirited, brave, loyal, and pure. They strained toward me. And suddenly she threw out a perfectly rounded arm, a slender hand, as one who asks for succor. Her lips parted, and once more she smiled, a smile so wistfully yearning that my whole heart answered its appeal.

This was Naia of Aphur—wife of my friend Jason Croft. In that instant I felt she was worth all and more than he had dared to win her. This was Naia, the woman who months ago had told him that in the silence of the night she had heard the beating of the wings of Azil, the bringer of new life, because of which I was here now beside her in that holiest of moments in a medical man's existence, when with hand and brain he waits to welcome a new life's birth.

Her lips moved. Distinctly I heard her speak:

"Dr. Murray—good friend of my beloved, who tells me of your presence in response to his appeal for your assistance to us—I bid you welcome to our home. Thrice welcome are you, upon whose coming depends, as he tells me also, our future happiness together, as well as the life of our child."

She addressed me most surprisingly in English, until I bethought me that Croft had doubtless taught her the tongue, exactly as he had taught her so much else: to fly the first airplane on Palos, the control of the astral body itself. Her words moved me oddly. I rose to answer:

"I am more than happy to be here, Princess Naia, and to bid you be of good cheer, remembering that even now Azil stands close by the gateway of life, in charge of a new-born soul."

And then I sank back, confused. I had spoken wholly on impulse, voicing the inmost emotions of my heart, forgetting my nebulous condition entirely for the instant in the spell of what seemed so real. With a feeling akin to acute annoyance at my

inability to speak thus to her directly I resumed my chair.

But even so, it seemed that I had reached her—that in some way akin to that in which Croft had assured me he would be able to follow my mental direction while working, she had sensed my meaning and intention. Women are intuitive by nature, more susceptible to the waves of a personal or thought vibration. Her lips moved again as I ceased speaking.

"Azil," she whispered. "But—that new soul is so long in passing, my friend."

I turned to Croft.

"Come," I hurled my thought force toward him. "Let us spare her more bodily anguish than must be endured. Let us make an end."

Of what followed I shall say no word. Suffice it to state that Jason Croft labored, grim of lips and pallid of feature; that I sat in that weirdest position of assistance capable of conception; that the lights burned on in that room where the pale form of Azil spread his wings on the pedestal of wine-red wood; that the eyes of Naia of Aphur widened until they were two dark pools no more than fringed by the purple iris; that the two female attendants waited, intent on naught save the catching, the rendering of obedience to each of Croft's intense though low-pitched words.

And then suddenly the man turned to me a face transfigured past anything I had ever pictured—a thread of sound—a wailing, trailing vibration—the first note of waking vocal strings, pulsed through the room—and Jason Croft the physician, the father, was kneeling beside that couch of copper, no longer the iron-nerved worker, the laborer for unborn life, but the husband, the lover, clasping the slender body of Naia of Aphur in his arms, and shaken by a strong man's sobs. I turned away my eyes.

And then his voice boomed out, strangely exalted and triumphant:

"Murray—we win—win, man—thanks to you and—God!"

I turned back. Croft spoke to one of the attendants. She crossed to a curtained doorway and lifted the purple drapings.

There stole into the room a girl of Mazzer—a graceful creature, for all the strange blue color of her naked skin. Twin braids of ruddy hair fell from her head to her waist. Her figure held all the untrammelled litheness of a panther as she advanced. Across her outstretched arms she bore a pure white cloth.

Upon it, the child of Jason Croft and Naia of Aphur was placed.

She wrapped the fabric about it, cradling it against her firmly budded breasts. She turned to Naia, smiling, sinking down beside her on her supple rounded thighs.

And then—for one brief instant I saw the light of the Madonna flame in those wonderful eyes—the light with which Naia the mother looked first on Jason's—son.

Croft addressed me.

"Maia," he said softly. "I've described her to you before if you remember, Murray. She asked that she might be permitted to attend the—the child."

His voice broke. His face was weary, overstrained, worn. I understood. The graceful girl was Naia's personal attendant—the Mazzerian woman, who had aided her mistress in saving Croft's life at a time when he was taken captive during the Mazzerian war. I nodded my comprehension. He bent again as though by irresistible attraction above the couch where the blue girl still was kneeling, and Naia seemed waiting his undivided attention. Once more I turned my head. It was the holy moment—the hour of realization between man and woman. Through the half-drawn curtains of a window, light stole into the room. It shamed the incandescents in their sconces. A finger of golden glory touched the tips of the upflung wings of Azil. With a start, I realized that the night of anguish was ended—that new life had come into the house of Jason with—the dawn.

CHAPTER III.

BACK TO EARTH.

I WENT toward the curtains and stood looking out between them, removing so far as I could even my invisible presence from the tableau behind me.

The attendants were moving about. I heard the soft pad of their gnuppa-hide sandaled feet, the softened tones of their voices. I heard Naia speaking and Croft's deeply quivering answer, and once more the wail of the child.

"Murray." Jason was speaking to me. I sensed his touch on my arm. Again he was in astral form. "Come, while the women perform their task."

My glance shot beyond him to where his physical body was seemingly lost in a lethargy of exhaustion, once more in the red wood chair. It did more. It fell on Naia. The ray of sunlight had lowered as Sirius had mounted above the eastern horizon. It made her golden tresses seem more than ever an aureole about her face on the pillow—a face grown exquisitely tender, lighted not merely with the sun of morning, but by the inner, the newly ignited glow of motherhood. I turned from it and followed Croft through the curtained doorway of the chamber, onto the balcony, along which one approached the room.

He had described it minutely to me, but even so I marveled at it as we stood together, sensing its proportions, its brilliant yet not offensive blendings of yellow and white and red. White was the balcony rail about it, red and yellow the alternating tiles that paved its floors. Red and yellow, too, were the steps of the stairs that mounted to the balcony from either end of the court, and red the carven pillars that supported the balcony on a series of arches, between which pure white examples of Palosian sculpture showed. Golden were the plates of glass in the roof above us—open mainly now to the air of heaven, that the flowers and plants and shrubs which dotted the unpaved portions of the court beneath us might breathe.

And then I think I must have started very much as Croft himself had done the first time he beheld such a sight, as I became conscious of a man, blue as the blue girl of Mazzer in the room behind me, wearing upon his shaven poll a single flaming tuft of red. Naked he was as Adam in all his stalwart manhood, and he bore a skin equipped with a sprinkling-nozzle upon his back while he sprayed the beds of grow-

ing vegetation—accompanied in his occupation by a slow-stalking beast remarkably like a hound.

Croft noted the direction of my glance and manner. "Mitlos—our majordomo, and Hupor," he said and smiled. "Zitu man, when I told you about them, the last thing I dreamed was that some day you should see them."

"And now?" I returned with a strange inclination to chuckle as I thought that Jason was no longer alone in being the first mortal to reach Palos in the astral presence, even though his potent will had helped me to my present position.

"And now"—he laughed in a tone of exultation—"you see not only them, but me, husband of Tamarizia's most beautiful woman, and thanks to you—the father of her child."

"Nonsense," I exclaimed, doubly abashed by his praise and my thoughts of a moment before, "I did nothing—what can a ghost accomplish?"

He turned fully toward me. His eyes burned with the strong fire of his spirit.

"I came here even as you are, Murray, and"—he waved a hand in a comprehensive gesture—"I have accomplished this, and other things besides—yet not so much that this morning—the most wonderful of all my span of existence, I have either words or deeds in which the assistance your presence within the last few hours gave me, may be repaid."

And no matter how he voiced it, I knew he meant it. The sincerity of his feeling forced itself upon me.

"Let us not speak of payment," I said—and I confess I felt embarrassed by the value he seemed to place upon what was no more than my agreement with his own valuation of a now favorably passed condition. "As it happens, Croft, my presence here was no more than the granting of an expressed wish."

He nodded. "The thought is father to the deed—isn't it, Murray? I thought of that last night. Come—I'll show you about the place."

Turning he led the way along the balcony to one end. We went down the red and yellow stairs.

At their foot was a group of sculpture—the figure of a man straining to defend a crouching woman from the fangs of a rending beast. It was of heroic size and wonderfully perfect detail. I recalled it from Croft's description of it, and how once he had told Naia that so he would defend her were his right to do so granted. Well—last night I had seen him do it. I had seen him strain body and soul to guard her from the yawning jaws of death. I said as much.

He gave me a glance. "You're an odd sort, Murray. You've a lot of the symbolism, the mysticism of life in your make-up. Come along. Let's get a breath of the morning air outside."

Once more I followed his lead across the red and yellow court where unknown plants bloomed about us on every side. Mitlos, intent on his duties, knew not of our passing, but Hupor sensed us, I think, and turned his huge head toward us, and stood looking at us out of amber eyes. Then we were outside the arch of a doorway at the head of a flight of pure white steps, on a far-reaching esplanade.

On every hand there were mountains, wooded on their sides. The house stood on one side of a natural mountain valley, in the emerald cup of which was a tiny lake, its waters gilded now by the rays of the Dog Star. And winding past it, and off along the flank of the hills in a series of perfect tangents was a wonderfully metaled road. I followed its turnings until I lost them, and my vision found itself baffled by a further reach of the landscape, blanketed as it seemed beneath a singular dun-colored haze.

In its way the scene was not unlike that of a morning on earth. I turned my eyes back to the dim shape of Croft beside me. He lifted an arm. "Over there is Himyra," he said, pointing, "but a ground fog is hiding the desert. If you'll look off across it, however, you'll see a silver sort of shimmer. That's the Central Sea."

Himyra—the capital of Aphur—the Central Sea. And this was Palos. The weirdness of the whole adventure came upon me. It was hard to realize. And the sun up there was Sirius and not the sun to which I was accustomed.

Abruptly Jason chuckled. "Murray—do you remember the night my housekeeper thought I had died, and routed you out in a storm, and you came to my house and compelled me to return from Palos by the infernal insistence of your will? Well, tit for tat, old man. That night I did your bidding, but last night I called you here."

"Quite so," I assented, smiling. In a way his remark seemed to lighten the atmosphere between us. I caught sight of a rapidly moving object. "Look there, Croft—there's one of your motors or some sort of speedy contraption coming up the road."

He glanced down the course of what I could not but agree he had done well at first to compare to the ancient highways of the Romans because of its permanent type of construction.

"Lakkon, by Zitu!" he exclaimed. "I telephoned him last night, but—I'd forgotten all about him. He said he'd drive out the first thing in the morning, and he seems to be burning the wind. See here—I'll have to leave you, Murray, long enough to welcome grandpa, if you don't mind."

I nodded. Lakkon was Naia's father. And it was no more than natural surely that he should be hastening to her, especially as she was the old noble's only child.

"Run along," I said. "There's plenty to look at. I'll amuse myself." Then, as an afterthought, I added: "Only don't spend too much time with him. I've got to be getting out of here, Croft, or some one's likely to fancy Dr. Murray is dead."

It had just occurred to me that it was morning also on earth and that unless I returned to my body, I couldn't tell what might happen in the institution of which I was the head.

Croft understood my meaning as well as I did, too.

"You're right. I'll be as brief as possible," he agreed and vanished, leaving me quite to my own devices.

I smiled. If one considered it was rather odd to be telling a man to go get back inside his own body in order to welcome his father-in-law in the flesh—or to contemplate a return flight across billions of ethereal miles to accomplish a reunion between

my material body and myself. Myself. I took a deep breath of the mountain air—at least, I went through the conscious effort with all the satisfaction of fulfilment. I was myself, really. I felt it, knew it—and I felt a buoyancy, a lightness, such as I had never known before now that the weight, the restraint of the body was removed.

I stood and watched Lakkon's motor arrive. I saw Croft's material form stalk forth to meet him at the head of the stairs. I saw Lakkon descend from his car and hurry upward, the strong figure of a man with graying hair, and an expectant light in his beardless face. I marked his dress.

It consisted of a tunic of purple, embroidered with an intricate design in small green stones, skirted, falling to just above the knees, and the metal, ankle-jointed combination of graeves and sandals Croft had described, plainly fashioned of gold, and reaching above the bulge of his muscular calves.

He met Croft and crashed his flat palm upon his shoulder with an exultant gesture. Croft extended his arm and laid his hand on Lakkon's shoulder. The two men passed inside.

I turned away. There was something vastly formal, vastly ancient, about that greeting—an old world atmosphere—that spoke of age-long custom, despite the throbbing motor in which the noble had reached the house of his daughter. There was almost something biblical about it, the thought came to me. They had met and laid their hands on each other's shoulders—two strong men, and looked into one another's eyes. I knew it the Tamarizian greeting of unfaltering friendship, no more a greeting than a pledge.

Well, then, Lakkon had gone to see his daughter. I gave a glance to the driver of his motor—a chap dressed plainly in blue unembroidered tunic, and copper leg-casings, with a fillet supporting a sun screening drape of purple fabric, about his head. Then I turned and made my way into the garden. It had occurred to me to examine the private bath.

I found it, screened behind vine-clad walls, and slipped inside it, past a staggered

entrance wall that screened its gate. It lay before me, a limpid pool in a basin of lemon stone like onyx save that it was neither mottled nor veined. It shimmered in the Sirian ray an oblong of water as brilliant as a bit of polished silver, inside the expanse of the enclosure, paved with alternating squares of rock-crystal and pure white stone. I stood gazing upon it, recalling that it was here Croft had once met Naia of Aphur—the first time when in defiance of all social custom on Palos, she had yielded him her lips.

Then I went back to the front of the house, and seated myself on a carved stone bench. I lifted my eyes to the light-filled heavens. This was Palos—and up there somewhere or down or sidewise—or however you chose to call it—was earth. It was like Omar as to direction when he says:

For Is and Is not though with rule and line
And Up and Down without, I can define—

Anyway, out there somewhere in the void there floated the mundane sphere, where the body of me might even now be exciting consternation among the staff of the hospital, where it had moved and held a little prestige in its work. And here was I. Suddenly there stole over me the sensation that the whole thing was a dream excited by Jason's stories—a feeling that I ought to rouse myself and get about my business. I rose. I felt all at once restless, vaguely disturbed. I turned and found Jason beside me.

"I was longer than I meant to be, Murray," he said. "And, see here—I know you'll understand me when I tell you it's past ten o'clock on earth."

I nodded. It was no time for misunderstanding or niceties of speech. More and more I was finding myself filled with a vital urge—to be away from here and about my own affairs.

"To tell the truth, with all respect to your feelings and those of Naia, I was getting impatient of your coming," I replied.

"She sends you her deepest thanks, and the blessings of Zitu and Ga the Mother," he responded quickly. "I know you know how I feel, old fellow. Now fix your mind on your body—and try to open its eyes."

I was ready. I put out a hand and laid it on his shoulder. He replied. We looked into one another's faces.

"Sometime—you'll come again," Croft told me. "And—now that we've established the astral power, I'll come to you, Murray—and when I speak you will answer. Don't forget it. Man—mayhap we'll build Tamarizia up together—at least, I can come to you like this from now on for knowledge—conversation. Can you see where the thing may lead to?"

"Yes," I said. "It's big, Croft—big. But if I don't get out of here now it may lead a very important part of me to the grave. Make my adieux to Naia. I'd envy you, man, if you weren't my friend. Now—do what you can to help me, for I'm going to try a pretty broad jump, as such things are considered."

I closed my eyes.

A sound like splintering wood assailed my ears. A blended sound of voices beat upon them.

"Murray—Murray—doctor!"

There was no doubt about it. A very human voice was calling to me—a hand laid hold upon my shoulder—only it wasn't the hand Jason Croft had laid upon it in farewell. The thing bit into the flesh. It seemed trying to shake me.

With an effort I lifted my lids and stared up into the face of a hospital orderly, strained and anxious. I was back on earth. There wasn't any doubt about it. I was on earth, in my room in the Mental Hospital, and in bed.

"Yes," I said; "yes."

The man's breath actually hissed as he let it out. He stammered. "You'll excuse us, doctor, but you didn't show up and you didn't answer when we rapped—and—well—we broke in the door at last. It seemed best."

His use of the pronoun arrested my attention. I made another effort and sat up. The orderly had fallen back from my bedside as he spoke, and beyond him I saw a nurse—a woman—not blue-robed like those I had seen in Naia of Aphur's apartments, but crisply gowned in white—and back of her the door of my own chamber, sagging open with a broken lock.

"It's all right, Hansen," I made answer. "I must have been pretty sound asleep." There wasn't anything else to say, any use to attempt a fuller explanation. "What time is it?" I asked.

"Ten thirty," said the nurse, consulting a watch on her wrist. "You're sure you feel all right, doctor?"

"Perfectly." I nodded. "If you'll withdraw, I'll get up."

She left the room and Hansen followed. I rose and began to dress. Outside a brilliant sunlight was visible through my windows. It showed me familiar objects. The Palosian landscape had faded. It had been after ten when Jason had come to me, too, as it were, speed a panting guest, and now it was half after ten, and I was back on earth. Well, he had told me the gulf could be bridged by the spirit in a flash.

Or had he? I fumbled my way into my garments in a somewhat clumsy fashion. I felt odd. Just what had happened, I asked myself. And it was then that the thing began to seem like a dream to me, really, no matter how vividly real it had seemed while it occurred. Save only for that vividness I think I would have considered it no more than a dream indeed.

But dream or not, it continued to go with me through all the familiar routine of the succeeding days. It kept bobbing up, in all its colorful details. I kept recalling that gorgeous chamber in which I had seen, or seemed to see, Naia of Aphur. I could even recall the soft thud of Lakkon's metal sandals as he mounted toward Jason, waiting to welcome him at the top of a flight of pure white stairs. And I could see again that light I had seen in the purple eyes of Naia—that exquisite look of the Madonna, I had seen in the faces of other new-made mothers, and in their eyes. Yes, if it had been a dream instead of an actual occurrence, it had been very, very real.

For the life of me, I couldn't decide. The mind of me balked no matter what the spirit decreed. As an actual fact, I wanted to believe I was in a somewhat similar position to men I have known, who tried to accept a religion, feeling their salvation depended upon it, and yet could not quite compass full acceptance in the end.

At the last I settled down to a sort of compromise with myself, based on my recollection of Croft's assertion that he would come to me some time for an astral conversation, similar to those meetings with Naia he had employed to sway her decision, before he finally won her and that I myself should visit Palos some time again. If those things happened I felt I could give credence without reservation. I did a lot of reading in Croft's books and waited. But he did not come.

A month passed and a little more, approximately such a span of time as they called a Zitran on Palos, where the year was a trifle longer than ours, though divided in similar fashion into twelve periods. I had about settled back into the acceptance of a completely corporeal routine, and then—once more I had word of Jason's son.

"Murray—Murray," a voice whispered to me in my slumber.

It roused me. I sat up, distinctly conscious of an intelligent presence in my room.

"Murray—get out of that cloud, and let's talk," what seemed a whisper prompted.

Something happened. Suddenly I was intensely awake, and I saw—the nebulous form of Jason, seated against the metal rail at the foot of my bed.

"That's better. How would you like to take another trip to Palos?" he inquired.

He smiled as he said it, and I answered in similar fashion. "If I can make the round trip a little quicker I wouldn't mind it. What's wrong up there now?"

"Nothing's wrong up there. Everything's all right."

His expression quickened. "But what happened?"

I told him, and he nodded. "Well, this will be different as you'll get back before morning. Murray, both Naia and I want very much that you should be present in so far as you can, two nights from now, at the christening of our son."

The christening of his son. The thing thrilled me. It was real then, and not a dream after all. I had really gone to Palos that night over a month ago, and now—Croft had kept his promise. He was here asking me to essay the venture again.

"Of course," he said as I delayed my

answer in the grip of full realization, "you'll see without being seen, but—after it's over—Naia wants to meet you astrally at least. Will you come?"

Naia wanted to meet me. After the thing was over and the others were gone, we three would meet as Croft and I were meeting now and establish a personal relation.

"Will I?" I exclaimed. "Well, rather."

Croft smiled. "It will be a somewhat brilliant spectacle. You'll enjoy it," he declared.

We talked for an hour after that, before he vanished, and I found myself sitting bolt upright in bed, staring into the darkness and filled with the firm conviction that on the second night from this I would witness the christening of Jason's son.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHRISTENING.

THAT conviction went with me during the two succeeding days and it was with the positive expectation of its fulfillment that I locked myself in my room and stretched myself out on my bed the second night.

I lay there and fixed my mind on the home of Lakkon in Himyra—the great red city of Aphur, where Croft had said the ceremony would occur. I pictured it even as I had pictured Jason's home in the mountains, its splendid court paved with the purest of rock-crystal, he had fancied glass when first he saw it, its circling balcony reached at either end of the court by yellow onyxlike stairs.

I focused every vestige of my will on reaching to it, and—suddenly—it seemed that I heard Croft calling me just as he had said he would do; the sense of lightness, of untrammelled freedom I had experienced on the other occasion came upon me—and—I was there.

Light, color. They were all around me. The flawless crystal of the floor caught the radiance from the lights above them in a million facets, broke it into a myriad flashing pin-points of refraction until the whole, vast court seemed paved with a shimmering iridescent carpet. White was

the balcony about it, and the pillars on which it was supported, and the gleaming bits of sculpture between. And the shrubs, the banks and hedges of vegetation, in the unpaved beds of the court were green, save that they were blooming, loaded down with flowers everywhere.

Tables a-glitter with gold and glass stretched down the central portion of the sparkling pavement in the form of three sides of a rectangle, with a purple-draped dais at the closed end. Guests thronged the vast apartment, seated on chairs of wine-red wood or reclining on couches interspersed among the beds of flowering vegetation. Nodding plumes of every hue and shade graced the heads of the women. Of every grade of richness were their jewel-embroidered robes. Nor were their men-folk any whit behind them in the lavish ornamentation their tunics or metal cuirasses displayed.

Men and women, they were like birds of brilliant plumage, and as the lights struck down upon them, save for the gleam of the bared arms and shoulders and upper busts of the women, the glint of their fair limbs through the intricate slashings of their leg-casings and sandals of softest leathers, the rose tint of their knees, they blazed. A babble of voices—the rhythm of music from concealed harps, was in the room. I indulged in a single comprehensive glance and looked about for my hosts.

But I did not find them anywhere among their guests. Nor did Jason appear to greet me, though that I did not expect. We had arranged between us that he should summon me just before the ceremony occurred, and that we would meet only after the departure of the guests. Hence, failing to sight either Croft or Naia or even Lakkon, I made shift for myself.

A trumpet blared with a softened tongue. I became aware of a page in purple garments, standing with the instrument at his lips, on the topmost tread of one of the flights of yellow stairs.

The thrum of the hidden harps quickened. The assembled company rose. They stood and faced the stairway where now, something in the nature of a ceremonial procession show

Naia and Croft came first, Naia in white from the tips of her slender sandals to the feathers that nodded from a fillet of shimmering diamondlike jewels in the masses of her golden hair. Croft led her downward by the fingers of her bared left arm. He was in all his formal harness, golden cuirass, on the breast of which glowed the cross ansata and the wings of Azil in azure stones—golden graeves and sandals gem-encrusted, golden helmet supporting azure plumes.

And after them came Maia, the blue girl of Mazzer, bearing on a purple cushion, the child.

Lakkon followed, walking side by side with a man, stalwart, grizzled, strong-faced, clad in a cuirass of silver, rarest of all Tamarizian metals, wearing the circle and cross of Zitra, the capital city of the nation, done in more of the diamondlike stones upon his armor.

Jadgor, I thought; Jadgor, president of the Tamarizian republic, recognizing him from Croft's former descriptions and the quality of his dress.

Behind them, azure-clad—the cross ansata on his breast, a flame of vivid scarlet gems—stalked a man, white-haired and most benign of appearance, in company with a second, more stalwart, also in azure robes. They carried staves tipped with the looped cross and were followed by a boy supporting a tray of silver, on which were two silver flasks and a tiny, blazing lamp.

A man with a cuirass, on which showed a rayed sun, and wearing plumes of scarlet, and a woman, scarlet-robed, with the same ruddy feathers above her soft brown hair, brought up the rear.

Zud and Magur, and a temple boy, Robur and Gaya, his wife—high priest of Zitra and his deputy of Himyra, governor of Aphur and his consort, I named them to myself.

While the company kept silent and the harps filled all the air with a sort of triumphant pæan, the little procession advanced. It reached the foot of the stairs and crossed to the dais, mounted its steps. It formed itself in a shimmering semicircle, Croft and Naia—and Maia kneeling before them in the center—the others on either

side, and before them the boy of the temple and the two priests.

Him I named Zud, because of his bearing and his mane of snowy hair, raised his stave. The music died. Silence came down for a moment, and then the voice of Magur rose:

"Hail Zitu, giver of life, and Ga, through whom life is given, and Azil, bringer of life, we are met together that a name may be given unto this new soul, thou hast seen fit to assign to the flesh.

"Greetings to you, Naia, daughter of Ga, and to you, Jason, Hupor, named Mouthpiece of Zitu among men through whose union Zitu and Ga have expressed their will that life shall remain eternal, renewing its fire from generation unto generation, in the name of love. Is it your will that a name be given this, thy child?"

"Aye, priest of Zitu." Naia and Jason inclined their heads.

"And how call you it between yourselves?"

"Jason, son of Jason," came Croft's voice.

"Then present him unto Zud, high priest of Zitu, that he may receive Zitu's blessing at his hands," Magur said.

The blue girl of Mazzer raised the cushion in her arms with the child upon it. The temple boy advanced his silver tray, and knelt. Zud uncorked the silver flasks.

"Jason, son of Jason, in the name of Zitu, the father, and Ga, the mother, and Azil, the son, I baptize thee with wine and with water and light," he began. Moistening his fingers from one of the two flasks, he went on. "With wine I baptize thee, which, like the blood, invigorates the body, and strengthens the heart and makes quick the brain." Bending, he touched the child on the forehead, poured water from the other flask into his palm and continued, "I baptise you with water which nourisheth all life, purifies all with which it comes in contact, makes all things clean."

He paused and sprinkled the glowing little body before him, took up the light and a tiny bit of silver I had not noted before and threw into the little face a golden reflected beam. "With light I baptize thee Jason, Son of Jason, since by the will of

Zitu it is the light of the spirit which fills the chambers of the brain. May that light be with thee ever and forever, nor be absent from thee again."

Of course I didn't understand it. It was only afterward when Croft had translated it to me that its inward meaning was plain, but the solemnity of the ritual, the rhythm of well-balanced words, the quiet attention of the assembled guests and the reverent voice of the priest affected me, who stood unseen with the company on the dais, as he baptized Jason's son.

And then he took the cushion from the kneeling girl of Mazzer and lifted it, turning to face the brilliant assemblage.

"Jason, Son of Jason," he cried, holding the infant toward them.

"Hail, Jason, Son of Jason," the guests responded like a well-drilled chorus, and the thing was done.

Followed a feast, similar I fancied in every detail to those Croft had told me he had witnessed at first and been privileged later to attend. Men and women reclined at the tables on padded divans. Blue servants moved about, filling the golden and crystal goblets with wine, loading the golden plates with food. Once more the harps broke forth. And suddenly from under the farther yellow stairway there broke a band of maidens, clad in garlands of woven flowers, and danced to the music of the harps, with a waving of slender arms, a bending of supple, unrestrained bodies, a flashing of whitely rounded limbs. With dances and music the feast ran to an end.

The guests departed, last of them according to Tamarizian custom Jadgor, president of the Republic, the guest of honor, and with him Gaya and her husband Robur, governor of Aphur and Jadgor's son. Naia took the child into her arms from the hands of its Mazzerian attendant. She and Jason moved toward the stairs. I knew that the hour I had waited had come.

I followed up the stairway and along the balcony and to a room—hung here in golden tissues, furnished with wine-red woods and twin couches of inlaid copper—with the mirror pool in its center and once more the figure of Azil close beside it as in Jason's home.

Naia placed the child on a tiny couch and covered its sleeping form with a bit of silken fabric. She turned to Jason, her blue eyes shining. He drew her into his arms and held her, smiling.

"There is yet one guest, beloved," he said in English.

"Aye," she responded softly; "but—one who understands the heart both of the wife, and the mother of Jason's son."

"And awaits a welcome from her," said Jason. "Come, beloved." He led her to one of the copper couches and sat down with an arm about her white-sheathed form.

From it there crept a lovely thing—an exact replica of it—the very essence of it, as indeed it was and seemed, as the lights in the chamber flooded down upon it. And that shape stretched out its slender hands. It swayed toward me, with Croft's astral presence close behind it.

"At last," said Naia of Aphur, "I may welcome you, Dr. Murray, as mine and Jason's friend."

"At last, I may converse with Naia of Aphur, and thrill with the glory of her—a thing I have long desired," I replied, and took her shadowy hand and raised it to my none less shadowy lips, yet with a distinct sensation of the contact none the less.

She smiled, and glanced at Jason. "Beloved, are all the men of earth so courtly? It was even so if you remember that you met me first in the flesh."

Croft chuckled.

"Life is much the same on earth or Palos," he made answer. "Well, Murray, what do you think of Palosian life?"

"Babylonian," I said. "You were right in the simile beyond question. I was thinking to-night when I watched it that it was almost a pity in one way you should be changing it all with your innovations."

He nodded. "In a way I've thought as much myself. I get your meaning. But I'm going to try and preserve it at least in part."

"Babylonian?" said Naia in a tone of question.

Jason and I explained, and she heard us out.

"Oh, but—things must change, must they not, Dr. Murray?—and the common

people will be so much happier for the knowledge Jason brings to Palos. And even I—think where I and my child would be now save for the knowledge possessed by a man of earth. It is to you and Jason that we owe our lives. Think you not that I carry your name to Ga and Azil in my prayers—that I have wished to meet you in order to express my thanks myself?"

Her words gave me a feeling of something like exaltation, even while in a way they embarrassed. "I, too," I faltered, "am very glad of the meeting, to be able to assure you that it was my happiness to serve you, and to wish you and Jason the happiness of each other, and your son a long and useful life."

She glanced toward the tiny couch and back again smiling. "Life," she said softly. "It is so wonderful to hold him—to realize that his life is but the blending of Jason's and mine. Sometimes I even think that I understand in a measure what Ga must feel as she guards the eternal fire."

And what is one going to say to a wife and mother when she talks like that? I know I mumbled something to the effect that what Ga probably felt was an all compelling compassion and love. And then I asked Croft to translate the words of the baptismal ceremony as voiced by Magur and Zud the high priest.

He complied and I questioned him of Jadgor and Gaya and Robur, confirming my recognition of Naia's relatives and his friends. Conversation became general for something like an hour, and then Jason prompted. "Beloved, shall we accompany Murray somewhat—show him Himyra in passing when he returns?"

"Aye, as you like," she assented. "And he must come to us again. Now that our need has rendered possible such communion it will not be necessary for you to seek earth in the flesh when you need additional knowledge, or leave me overly long again."

Croft nodded. "Yes, Murray is going to have his hand in Tamarizian affairs from now on, and the boy there will know more than any man ever born on Palos in the end. Well, Murray, want to see Himyra?"

"I've always wanted to see it since you told me about it first," I assented.

"Then come along."

"But," I added as he led the way with Naia through one of the open windows of the chamber, "I never expected to see it exactly like this."

Naia turned her eyes and smiled as we floated free of the house and upward under Croft's guiding will. "Dear friend," she said, "you know so much of us that to me it does not seem strange to find you one of us at last."

"Behold Himyra," said Croft, and flung out a shadowy arm.

The city lay beneath us. I saw the double row of lights that fringed the flood of the Na, the mighty pyramid of Zitu, upreared against the skyline, black now instead of red, save where the lights threw ruddy splashes upon it, banded with white at the apex with the pure white temple of Zitu upon its truncated top—the long line of the houses of the nobles of the old régime, fronting a wide street at the top of the river embankment in an amazing vista, set down each in its private grounds among night-darkened shrubs and trees, the wide-flung palace of the governor of Aphur, once the palace of Jadgor, Aphur's king. The thing swam a shimmering vision before me under the light of the Palosian moons. I strained my eyes and saw the mighty sweep of Himyra's shadowy walls.

It moved me oddly. Already I knew so much of the city's history as involved in Croft's romance. I turned my eyes.

"Himyra," I said, "I shall not forget it—nor Naia of Aphur, nor Jason, mouthpiece of Zitu, nor Jason, Jason's son. Zitu guard you, my friends. I must be going."

"Zitu guard thee," Naia answered.

And suddenly I was back in my own room, remembering her parting smile.

These things have I narrated in order to show how there was built up between Croft and Naia of Aphur, his mate, and myself, a subtly intimate relation that must, as I hope, make what followed plain.

Life went on pretty much with me after that for some further eight months, however, before the events I intend to relate occurred. Now and then during the interval Jason Croft came to me in the astral presence, and on several occasions I suc-

ceeded by my own endeavors in visiting him and Naia in their home.

Between them they taught me somewhat of the Tamarizian tongue, Croft explaining that as all life was the same in reality, and the thought back of the word similar in intent even though the word itself might vary in sound, all languages were really one in thought and purpose. With that as a key, I soon discovered that the spoken words of those about me were not difficult for one in the astral condition to understand—that the vibrations of their thought affected the astral shell in a manner that made their meaning plain.

I suggested to Croft that it was because of that very thing he had so readily apprehended the speech of Tamarizia when he first projected himself to Palos and came down outside Himyra's walls, rather than because of the similarity of their speech to the Sanscrit, now nearly a forgotten tongue on earth, and he nodded and smiled.

"Exactly, Murray," he agreed, "but then I didn't realize it altogether, and—" He broke off and glanced at his wife.

"And you had something else to think about," I said, grinning as I recalled how he had seen Naia that first morning and followed her to Lakkon's house, drinking in her beauty.

"It's true I wasn't very logical in my considerations the first time I heard the language," he replied, and Naia of Aphur dropped her eyes. The inner fires of her spirit seemed to quicken. I think she would have blushed had she been in the flesh instead of sitting there with us like an inexpressibly lovely wraith.

So at least in those months I acquired a fair understanding of their speech, and I came more and more to regard their home

in the western mountains of Aphur, across the desert from Himyra, on Palos, with the same intimacy of feeling I might have experienced for the home of two friends of earth. My conversations with Jason came more and more to resemble consultations on modern affairs. He asked me constantly concerning this and that fresh progress in mundane matters. He discussed with me his plans for improving material and social conditions on Palos. He had already established a series of public schools for the masses where, before his arrival, education of a sort had been provided only for the nobles and men of wealth. Plainly the man was planning to do more where he had already done so much. He had given them moturs—as they called them—airplanes, electricity, printing, telephones of short radius at least, weapons by which Zollaria's schemes had been overthrown. And now he planned to lead them toward higher standards of national and commercial and individual life. And but for what occurred there is no telling what, working together as we were at the time, we might have accomplished.

Indeed Croft had established both wireless and telegraphic communication between Zitra and Himyra, and was planning railways on which he intended to run motor-driven trains—was dreaming of a great belt line about the Central Sea, with lateral branches to reach every part of the nation.

And then—one night he called me to him as he had called me the night of Jason's birth—and I found him in the selfsame chamber, with the purple draperies half torn down and trampled—the fair form of Azil drowned in the mirror pool, beside which the dead body of Mitlos the Mazzerian majordomo lay sprawled.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

U U U

THE TRIUMPH OF SPRING

MID the green boughs that interlace
 I see a matchless form and face,
 With deep-blue eyes and sun-bright hair—
 Spring, the coy maid, forever fair,
 Whose roguish yet defiant glance
 Defeats old Winter's last advance!

William H. Hayne.

The Jumping-Off Place



By Harold Lamb

TWO black rocks rising out of the sea. And the sea, here on the under side of the world, is never still. Nor is the wind ever still; and seldom does the sun—far to the north—break through the gray clouds.

These two rocks are the Evangelistas. They are the twin evil sentinels at the Pacific entrance of Magellan Strait down at the bottom of South America.

To the east of the Evangelistas, close at hand, are the rocky islands that fringe Magellan Strait. To the west, the Pacific.

The sea is gray, the fogs are gray. The gray curtain of rain shuts in the Evangelistas and the lighthouse that stands on one of the rocks.

When food is brought to the keepers of the light it is hauled up by a rope when the weather is fair and a whaleboat can approach the rock. Once the vessel bringing supplies to the Evangelistas waited forty days for fair weather.

So you understand that the Evangelistas are very much like a prison and the keepers of the light are the prisoners.

"The Good Book says," John Bruce repeats, "that God, when He made the world, separated the water from the land; but when He did that He must have forgot Tierra del Fuego."

It was the holiday season in the upper world—which means late spring in Magel-

lan Strait—when Dave Thornton, citizen of New York City, approached the bar in one of the water-front saloons of Punta Arenas.

Punta Arenas, sometimes called the Jumping Off Place, was enjoying its holiday season. It was carnival time. A dancing floor had been installed in the saloon; a phonograph jangled merrily.

There were two reasons for celebration in Punta Arenas. The gold fever was running high; *conquistadors* had washed the metal by hand from the coastal barranca, and found it rich indeed. This had brought Dave Thornton to Punta. Also, a party of Norwegian scientists had come to study the strait. Women, hearing of the gold fever, had come hastily by steamer from Buenos Aires and Valparaiso. These women were mestizos, for the most part; but many were half-castes of Paris and Rio, handsome women, well dressed, for Punta had its rich men.

Some of them had been on the steamer that brought Dave Thornton and the celebrated Norwegians; they had not looked at him, except perhaps curiously. For one thing, he was palpably penniless; and in his sharp, young face was the wisdom of the world that lives by its wits.

"I want," said Dave Thornton to the negro behind the bar, "one job, Smoke. Know of any?"

A Jamaica black has a sense of dignity

and is not accustomed to being addressed as Smoke.

"Hi sye," retorted the negro shrilly, "what a little man hit is, to be sure!"

Sheer surprise held Thornton's resentment in abeyance. As a stowaway on a British freighter he had come into conflict with unknown types; but he had never heard a negro talk like a Cockney.

"If you're twins," he grinned, "where's the other one?"

The barkeep was not much older than Dave. "Hi'm a Jamaica gentleman, sah!"

A negro would always rather chuckle than quarrel. A glance into Dave's alert, gray eyes rendered the black prudent. He smiled back, and before the evening was far advanced the two were friends. Jamaica admitted that jobs were plentiful, and Dave had visions of becoming personal assistant to a *conquistador* at one of the claims.

Contemptuously the young American surveyed the mob of Chinamen, Italians, Poles, and Kanakas, and the violently painted mestizos in the place. These folk were not what he sought; yet the night was passing, and he had urgent need of a bed.

At this point Dave perceived a rear room and, through half-drawn curtains, four men seated about a table.

Money was stacked on the table.

Dave walked to the door, and as he did so the barkeep, who was busy for the moment, called to him sharply. But the boy stepped noiselessly inside; straightway three of the four looked up. Dave recognized the glance. He had often indulged in craps in vacant lots of a Sunday.

Yet there was no law against gambling in Punta. In fact, there were very few laws at all in those days. A man's past was his own affair.

Dave's lean face was wistful and guileless. So two of the four poker-players did not suspect that the boy who watched them from a near-by box had noticed that they dealt often from the bottom of the pack.

He was far too wise to comment on this fact. Once he had spoken unwisely during a fo'c's'le game, and had limped for a week from a lascar's knife-thrust. Dave duly noted that the two—Spiggotty swells,

he classified the colorfully dressed, dark-faced Chileans—who dealt from the bottom of the pack were winning. They answered to the names of Manuel and Pedro. One of the others, an Englishman with a turkey-red face, who was addressed politely as Señor Juan, was deeper in drink and was fast losing the pile of tiny gold nuggets that had been in front of him.

It was the fourth man who spoke to Dave.

"You are looking for a job? You said so, yes?"

Dave surveyed him. He was Dom Calbuco, an elderly Portuguese. He had friendly black eyes and well-kept hands. His careless play showed that it meant little to him to lose.

Dave reflected that Calbuco must have heard him talking to the barkeep.

"Maybe," he admitted. "I'd like to get out to the gold fields."

Calbuco tossed, faces down, three queens into the discard. Now, Dave had seen that Señor Juan, the Englishman, who took the pot, had held a lonely pair of tens. It struck him as curious; but his mind was intent on Calbuco's offer.

"Certainly," the Portuguese agreed. "I need a watchman—a guard. I will pay well." His black eyes scanned the young American appraisingly. "Ten pounds a month, when your job is ended. You can handle a revolver. You have one, yes?"

Dave carried an old Colt that he had bought after the painful experience with the lascar's knife. He had been raised among the gangs of the lower West Side, in New York, and fighting had been perforce a part of his education.

So it was agreed that Dave was to work for Calbuco for one month. For this he was to receive fifty dollars, gold. He would leave Punta on a coastal steamer for the place on the morrow at sunup. Meanwhile he could sleep on the vessel.

"You're sure it's out on a mining claim. Mr. Calbuco?" he insisted warily.

Calbuco smiled indulgently.

"A landmark, Thornton. Every one in the strait is bound for it."

When the game broke up the three others went out, Calbuco nodding cordially to

Dave; but Mr. John remained slumped in his chair. He had lost a good deal to the two Chileans, and Calbuco had advanced him some money to make his settlement.

Dave glanced around cautiously and shook him by the shoulder.

"Say, you. Those two Spiggotties was dealing off the bottom of the pack. Get me? Watch your step next time."

Mr. John yawned and opened haggard, bloodshot eyes. His thin face was furtive, yet not bad-looking.

"My friends, my lad," he murmured. "Help me home, will you? Much obliged."

He smiled good-naturedly and tapped his head.

"A fortune there, you know. Mus' be careful." Gripping Dave's shoulder, he walked through the saloon tolerably steadily. The boy looked for the Jamaica bar-keep, thinking to question him concerning Calbuco and his affairs. But the negro had been relieved and was no longer in the place.

"What sort of a guy is this Calbuco?" inquired Dave of his new companion as they passed out into the rain.

"Guy? Oh, a decent sort, a bit of all right."

Mr. John's voice was husky. Dave guessed that he was a sheep-herder or perhaps a prospector, an educated man, now down on his luck.

"Calbuco's shipping magnate—dragnet, that's the word. Hires men like a reg'lar dragnet." He stopped in the mud of a street-crossing and scowled as if trying to focus his mind on something. "If he's hired you—may be dangerous, no end."

Dave did not mind that especially. Twenty-two years of hard knocks had not altogether quenched his desire for adventure.

The two avoided a drenched police officer huddled in his cloak under one of the dim lamp-posts. Passing a small hotel on the shore, they saw the Norwegian explorers busied about their luggage on the veranda, heedless of the music and uproar of the saloons and the quieter revelry in the plaza and at the one club in Punta.

He was startled when they reached the door of Mr. John's shanty to see the door

flung open and the dark face of an Indian peering at them.

Dave's reaction was a swift move toward his revolver. Quickly as he acted, the figure at the door had darted aside and merged into the night before he could speak.

"Looks like a second-story man to me," he muttered; "only there ain't any second story."

Mr. John was peering after the fleeing form. Dave heard him chuckle. "Thousands of pounds right here in my head. That's what he missed. Mus' be careful—"

He stepped inside the shanty, and Dave heard clumsy fingers barring the door.

"Guess he's all right now," considered the boy, turning back toward the docks and his new ship. All told, he had passed an interesting evening. He had seen a poker-player—Calbuco—lay down a winning hand for no apparent reason. And he had seen another poker-player—Mr. John—borrow money to square his reckoning and at the same time carry what he called a fortune about with him. As for the Indian—a Patagonian thief was commonplace enough.

Some days later Dave was surprised to perceive that his new job was to be on an island at the western end of the strait. At least so it seemed to him. A whaleboat from the steamer rowed in to an immense black rock in mid-channel, and supplies from the boat were hauled up to the top of the rock by a long rope. Then Dave was hauled up.

"I'll try anything once," muttered Dave, when the Portuguese bosun failed to answer his question as to what was on the top of the rock. So, gripping a note from Calbuco, the boy was hoisted to the Evangelistas and the tender mercies of the keeper of the light.

Dave was quick of wit. Scarcely had he surveyed the top of the rock when he yelled for the whaleboat to come back. The sailors grinned up at him. The two keepers hardly looked at him as they checked off the supplies.

For the next month his domicile was several hundred yards of dank cliff-top, overgrown with moss, and a single bare cabi

that he shared with two Chileans, the keepers, who could not speak English, and who read the note from Calbuco with a grim smile.

The note said Dave was to be kept indefinitely.

"Calbuco was right," thought Dave. "This is a landmark, and 'most every ship in the strait heads for it, one way or the other. Guess I'm shanghaied all right."

Before the first few days of the month had passed he saw why it was necessary to use strong measures to induce helpers to serve on the Evangelistas.

There was no boat attached to the light, because there was no place to moor a boat. The head keeper had a scrofulous disease; the other Chilean was suffering from melancholia, and deaf. He seldom heard a word spoken. In order to escape beatings he made the best of the matter, and worked for the two.

In the first month he counted five clear days. For the rest, fog, rain, and hail, and always wind. Sometimes the spray filled the air so that he could hardly breathe outside the house. By persistent questioning he found that he was expected to serve indefinitely, as the deaf Chilean was "sick." Also that vessels called irregularly every two or three months—no oftener.

In the fog he could hear the sirens of passing craft and on a clear day could glimpse an occasional coaster or lime-juicer sloaching along. These, naturally, gave the Evangelistas a wide berth.

Dave set his jaw and waited, perched on the platform by the light. The cold ate into his slim body, and the desolation worked on his mind.

"And the dirty, sneaking heathens unlimbered my artillery," he muttered to himself.

His revolver had been deftly removed in the whaleboat when he started to climb the rope to the cliff-top.

He knew that he would be given no opportunity to leave the Evangelistas when the next supply-boat came. And that might be two months. So Dave waited for three things—clear weather, an English or American vessel, and daylight. Meanwhile he thought about benevolent Calbuco, and

the way that the Portuguese had tricked him.

These three things never happened as he hoped.

But at the end of five weeks he saw the schooner. It was a dirty-looking craft moving down the coast toward the strait, half visible in the brief twilight.

Within half an hour of sighting the vessel and marking its course Dave had descended ostentatiously into the cabin where the two keepers sat smoking, and had slipped out when darkness closed in. He had reached the edge of the rock and clambered down as far as there was foothold. Overhead the beam of the light shot out against the black sky.

Dave strained his eyes until he could make out the lights of the schooner; then he stripped off coat and shoes and jumped—as he had often jumped from the iron piers of the lower West Side, when swimming in the Hudson.

Half-way to the schooner he was exhausted. But his shouts had attracted attention. A boat put out.

Dave told the Chilean captain that he had drifted out of the strait in a whaleboat and lapsed into unconsciousness. This was because he had no desire to be questioned further.

He was lying on the after-deck at the time, a lantern beside him, and from under his eyelids he saw a strange thing. A child stood talking to the skipper, a young girl in a gray cloak of a kind that seemed vaguely familiar to Dave.

She bent over him until a strand of long, black hair touched his throat. Her face seemed the hue of gold, and her eyes were black as the night itself. Dave could feel her breath warm against his cheek.

That was how he met Señorita Clara.

He learned her name the next day, also that she was a passenger on the Chilote, bound for Punta. When the skipper would have set him to waiting on table Dave rebelled, vowing to himself that he would work for no more Chileans. Aloud he said:

"I'm Señor Calbuco's *huilliche*. You *sabe* that, *capataz mio*?"

The Spanish language was nearly a closed book to the boy, but he possessed the gift of making himself understood as well as making friends.

"I am going to Señor Calbuco's house," observed the young girl in good English as the skipper turned away with a shrug.

Dave surveyed her voluminous gray garments, her delicate olive face and dark eyes, and wondered if she were not Calbuco's daughter. Having leisure now for conversation and some one to talk to, he questioned her as the two snatched a brief blessing of sunlight on the poop-deck. And he learned the reason for her somber dress and her invincible shyness that would not let her talk with him unless the captain was near by.

Clara was not quite seventeen. She had been left by her father in a Catholic seminary for four years, up the coast at Ancud. Now her father had sent for her, and she had been put in charge of the captain, a good Catholic. Her mother, a Spaniard, had been dead for many years. Had Dave seen her father in Punta?

"Sure, I saw him."

"He is a very fine man. He has become rich."

"That's what I heard," admitted Dave. His quarrel was not with the daughter of Calbuco, if Clara was Calbuco's daughter.

She smiled and showed him the letter she had received. It had come at Christmas, she said, when she had been very lonely.

Reluctantly Dave glanced at the missive.

DEAREST CLARA:

I have made arrangements with our friends in Ancud for you to come to Punta. We can leave Punta very soon because I have made a fortune for you. Then we will go home. I have located a claim that I have called after your mother—the Isabella. It is so rich that gold can be washed by hand on the barranca—but you do not understand such things. I am living now in a big white house on the plaza that you will like.

The name signed to the letter was Señor Juan. On the envelope Dave saw an inscription:

From John Bruce, Cuerpo de Bomberos,
Punta Arenas.

"Is your father an Englishman?" asked Dave. "Ain't he got gray eyes?" And he added: "Why are you going to Calbuco's?"

"That is where my father is staying, with his friend Señor Calbuco."

It was all quite clear. Bruce had left his daughter with the nuns at Ancud while he tried his luck in Punta at sheep-herding or prospecting. He had been carrying in his head the secret of the location of the mining claim, the Isabella, that was so rich in gold, when Dave had encountered him. And Calbuco was Bruce's friend.

But the Portuguese was by no means Dave's friend.

During the slow run along the tide-beset strait, between barren mountains, Clara spent much of her time on deck watching the circling condors, and the distant snow-peaks. She smiled at everything and every one, including Dave.

The boy was even more shy than she, until the girl persuaded him to tell her about the great city of New York, where the *haciendas* were like the cliffs of Magellan and a railroad ran on a bridge through the streets. Dave was homesick for the rattle of the Elevated at Chatham Square.

She confided in him that John Bruce had wandered with her after the death of her mother to Bermuda and Valparaiso, and that they had been very poor. One morning she threw him a kiss, and the boy's heart swelled in his chest.

"She's a good-looker, all right," he thought, "even if she is part dago." And he took Clara Bruce into the select circle of his friends, to be admired and fought for.

Clara had assured him that John Bruce would meet her at the jetty at Punta. But Dave, peering from the break of the poop when they reached the jetty, saw that a large woman with a velvet hat and expensive furs approached the girl on the dock, and took her to a waiting carriage. The woman, the captain of the schooner informed him, was the wife of Señor Calbuco.

Whereupon Dave shadowed the carriage through the few streets of the town to a granite house fronting the central plaza.

Then he trotted back to the saloon where his Jamaica friend was to be found.

"You got a gun?" he whispered. "Lend it to me."

"Hindeed not," returned the barkeep.

"Listen, Jamaica," wheedled Dave, "I got to have a gun. I'll pay you ten dollars for it."

"'Ave you the ten dollars, Hamurrica?" grinned the black. And as Dave assured him that the money would be forthcoming within two days he grinned the more. "Ow did ye get hoff the Evangelistas?"

Jamaica's conscience had troubled him. He had meant to warn Dave to steer clear of Calbuco, but he had not been able to find him.

Calbuco, the black admitted, was a fish-hawk—the kind of hawk that waited until a patient sea-bird had secured a fish, and then bullied its victim into giving up the prize. So Jamaica confided under his breath, adding that Calbuco had been driven out of Rio not so long ago.

"Look here!" demanded Dave. "Tell me, where's John Bruce?"

The Jamaican polished a tumbler in silence and glanced warily at the saloon door. Conflicting emotions crossed his ebony face.

"'E's gorn awye. Been gorn a week."

Dave shook his head.

"Nix. He was waiting for his girl. He's in Punta, and I've got to find him."

"You won't find 'im. Hi sye, don't ye know when ye're bloomink well off? Take my word for hit—leave the bleeding place on the P. S. N. C. steamer, with the Norwegians, my lad." The negro's voice dwindled to a shrill whisper. "Calbuco hain't gorn on yer looks. 'E don't like to be spied on when 'e's at 'is little games, with Pedro and 'is mate."

"Pedro and Manuel are Calbuco's men?" Dave thought quickly. "Maybe I know more'n you think, rummy. See if I don't! Calbuco wants to do Bruce outer his mine, see? He stacks the Britisher up against a set of cheaters until Bruce owes him a heap of coin. Get me? Meanwhile the Spiggotties slip an Indian into Bruce's shack to look for information. Bruce is made to sell out to them, and then—"

"That's where you're mistaken, my lad. Mr. Bruce refused to sell 'is claim, and 'e did for the Hindian right and proper. 'Oo cares? They 'ad 'im jailed for that, but 'e wouldn't give in."

"And now he's missing—hey?"

The negro nodded cautiously.

"Look here, Jamaica, you're a good guy. Bruce's girl is here, and Calbuco has her."

"Han English lydy?"

"Sure." Dave strained a point. "She's a lady, all right. And that's more'n Mrs. Calbuco is."

Jamaica was profoundly disturbed. He had been born under the British flag, and an Englishwoman was sacrosanct in his eyes. A few words from him assured the American that the Calbuco woman had kept a house of bad repute in Rio de Janeiro before migrating to Punta, and that many of her associates had found lodging in the white house on the plaza. So Dave got his gun, a blunt-nosed .32.

"Not so worse," he thought.

That evening Señor Calbuco was entertaining friends at cards in a quiet room opening upon the balcony of his fine house. The balcony, by the way, ran clear around the building, and was shaded by the branches of a large tree.

The Portuguese, who was in excellent humor, had just announced to his friend the *alcalde* that he held three queens against two pair for the *alcalde*. And he was raking in the pot when another man spoke.

"If you are interested in mining claims, my friend Calbuco, I can tell you what we learned during our examination of the Tierra del Fuego shore near the western end of your strait."

It was one of the Norwegians, a giant of a man with merry blue eyes. His name was Walstrom, and he had come with his companion to pay Calbuco for the guides the Portuguese got them—at a price.

Walstrom and Quensel were not playing; they had been interested for some time in certain sounds resembling the sobbing of a woman not far away. They were too polite to ask questions.

"Yes," agreed Calbuco, "you were saying that you saw—"

Here he was interrupted quite abruptly by the sight of a blue revolver pointed at his head from the open French window that gave access to the balcony.

"Put up your hands, all of you," urged Dave Thornton. "Back away from the table to the other side of the room."

They did so—Pedro and Manuel and Calbuco and the *alcalde* and another man. Walstrom and Quensel uttered a forceful oath and sat still. They were by no means afraid. Moreover, the intruder did not seem to be looking at them.

"Fifty dollars, Calbuco."

Dave moved cautiously forward to the table.

"That's what you owe me for one month's work. I'll collect it myself from your pile, see?"

Watching them the while, Dave sorted out with his fingers a number of silver dollars and bank-notes.

The stout *alcalde* spluttered something in Spanish about thieves.

"Keep your hands up like I said, Spiggotty," Dave advised him. "Now, Calbuco, you lied to me. You robbed an American citizen of his gun. That's right, ain't it? Well, I'm telling you that you have a lot more coming to you. Don't forget that. Stop wiggling your hands, Pedro—I ain't talking to you."

Dave pocketed the money and moved back toward the window.

"Tell your friends to turn around, Calbuco, and look at the wall. You do it, too."

Walstrom and Quensel looked at each other and grinned involuntarily. There was something humorous in the sight of five grown men plastered against the wall.

When they glanced at Dave again they saw only the double windows closing softly.

Pedro's knife hurtled across the room and through a glass pane. The Chilean was not a coward. Drawing a revolver, he slipped to the window and looked out into the darkness.

Manuel darted from the room toward the stairs. The *alcalde*, after a discreet interval, left to summon his police.

Calbuco wiped his brow; then he smiled.

"He will not get away, gentlemen. It will be impossible for him to leave Punta if he escapes from the house. He is a fool. You heard him threaten me?"

"He seemed," acknowledged Walstrom, who had no great fancy for Calbuco's type, and had been forced to pay high for his peons, "to mean what he said."

The Norwegians noticed that the woman was no longer sobbing.

A moment later Señorita Clara Bruce was startled when she saw the dark figure of a man enter the window of her room that opened upon the balcony. The night had brought real fear upon her—a fear that was no less real because she could not put it into words.

She had not been able to see her father. Instead, she was locked in her room and the wife of Calbuco had scolded her. Calbuco himself had told her that John Bruce was drinking; that he was a dishonest man; and that she must help them to make him give up some mine he had stolen.

It was quite a surprise to discover that the man who had come into her room in the dark was the young American she had met on the schooner, and Clara stopped crying, to huddle down farther into the bed-clothes.

"Listen here," said Dave in a whisper, "you got to get out here. I'll take you to your old man. They're keeping you here to make him give in to them. Understand?"

Whimpering, Clara admitted that she did not. She asked him, uncertainly, to leave the room.

"I can't," said Dave truthfully. "Anyway, you hurry up and dress. I'll be over by the window and I can't see nothing in the dark. Hurry."

Peering out through the shutters, he could make out men passing back and forth along the balcony and lights bobbing in front of the house. Presently the balcony was quiet and the lights moved out into the plaza as the pursuit drew further afield.

"You know where the back stairs is, don't you?" he grunted. "Well, come along. Oh—rats, don't worry. I'm taking you to a priest."

Gripping her slim hand in his, he moved

out on the now deserted balcony to the rear of the house. A minute or two later they arrived at the Catholic Church fronting the plaza, passing unseen behind the buildings. Here the priests consented to take her in, as Dave had expected.

"Don't you worry about me," he answered her anxious question. "No cop that wears a dago sword can pinch me."

When Dave said this he was quite alone in the town except for Clara and the timorous negro. He had committed a grave offense against the law; moreover, Calbuco had determined to blot him out.

Yet that night Calbuco and his men, with the men of the *alcalde*, ransacked the town and the boats in the harbor. Punta has few streets and not so many buildings. It would have been impossible for Dave to leave without being stopped. The next morning every near-by ranch was visited, equally without result.

Dave was in the one place Calbuco did not think to look for him.

Walstrom and Quensel were really annoyed when they were held up on entering their quarters in the Kosmos Hotel near the water-front by the same man who had visited Calbuco's establishment.

"I don't want to hurt you gents," he informed them—Walstrom spoke good English. "But I got some talking to do, and I want you to listen."

"Very well," assented the giant explorer amusedly. "We don't owe you anything, though. Won't you have a cigarette?"

"Sure. Look here, Walstrom, all you have to do to land me in the Punta cooler is to yell: But you're a square man—I came down on the schooner with you. I'll put away the gun if you'll gimme your word to sit quiet and see we ain't interrupted."

"I agree," Walstrom smiled. "But I advise you to do your best to leave Punta while it's dark. There is no American consul within a thousand miles, or any countryman. You've—ah—held up an *alcalde* and robbed Calbuco, who has a good deal of money and influence, besides a ship or two."

"He's my meat." Dave puffed at his cigarette seriously. "You was talking

about the Tierra del Fuego mines when I busted in this evening. Did you see anything of the claim of John Bruce when you was over there?"

"The Isabella? Quensel, on one of his solitary rambles in search of fossiliferous deposits, saw the claim-stakes on the shore of the strait."

"Does it look like a paying proposition to you?"

Walstrom yawned and laughed.

"That is just what I was about to remark to your friend Calbuco. These so-called mines were discovered by amateurs. There are no actual gold deposits in Tierra del Fuego. We examined one or two of the sites."

"I didn't think Bruce could pick a winner," the boy sighed. "But he showed gold nuggets."

"Gold particles. My young brigand—I don't know your name—the gold of Tierra del Fuego can, literally, be picked up or rather washed by hand. It is produced solely by the action of the sea on the sands along the coastal barranca. The sea has been washing down that sand for hundreds of years. After a storm Quensel and I would light our pipes and go out and gather a little along the beach. But the gold itself would not pay the cost of tools or formation of a company—"

Walstrom shrugged. "Every decade or so the gold craze strikes Punta, and new *sociedades auríferas* are formed, only to be bankrupt. Now, am I to be shot or not?"

Dave met his searching blue eyes fairly. The boy was thinking that the gold mine of the Bruces was a myth, after all, and they were badly off as ever.

"You're a square man, Walstrom, the only one I know in Punta. I got a girl friend, and she's in trouble in this burg. Say, you come with me and hear her tell what she's up against. They won't stop me, in the dark, if I'm with you, see?"

"My lad," objected the explorer impatiently, "I have other things to do. Such as sleep. We are sailing to-morrow."

Quensel, who had been staring at Dave askance, also growled out an irritated oath. "Clear out!" he said.

"Calbuco's holding her old man a pris-

oner," pleaded the boy. "And her father discovered the Isabella."

"If that is the case, I'll assure Señor Calbuco that the mine has no real value, and he will release this man." Walstrom did not desire to be involved in a quarrel in Punta; he had witnessed ugly terminations to such quarrels. But Dave's thin face, lined by hunger, was a mask of determination.

"No, sir," he responded promptly. "That ——— dive-keeper has Bruce in his debt, and he can use Clara. He'll promise you anything, and forget it as soon as you sail. Clara and her old man have got to go on the ship with you. They're my friends, and I'm going to stick to them."

Walstrom shook his head grimly. "I heard you say you had a score to settle with Calbuco. What would the Norwegian Geological Society say if I helped a thief to even his score—besides, how am I to believe you?"

Dave's quick wit detected the slight note of indecision.

"You'll believe the girl. She's sitting up for you in one of the cathedral chapels that's open all night. You heard her crying in Calbuco's place. You're a square sport, Walstrom. *Listen* to her, anyway."

Gray dawn was creeping into the drawn shutters of the Kosmos, and Quensel had been snoring like the healthy animal he was for some time when Walstrom returned and woke him up to explain what he had promised the American boy and the outcast girl.

"It was the only way to be rid of him," he answered Quensel's growl. "God's thunder, man!" he burst into a hearty laugh. "It will be a good comedy, anyway."

"It's lucky we sail to-morrow," muttered the other.

At this point in the proceedings Dave Thornton had made a second friend in Punta, the first being the negro. Moreover, he had formed his plan, while pleading with Walstrom.

It was then the hour in early dawn when crimson was streaking the cloudy sky behind the bare hills overlooking the tin roofs of the

sleeping town. A fresh breeze was sweeping in from the roads. Dave guessed that his pursuers were sleeping for a space. The solitary policeman on his route to the waterfront saloon was easily dodged.

And Jamaica, awakened in his cubby in the rear of the saloon, rubbed his eyes at the feel of fifty dollars in good silver and bills.

"That's yours," whispered Dave in the dark, "if you take me to Mr. Bruce. It'll be dead easy—they're all pounding their ears."

John Bruce was more or less drunk when the two boys got to him in a locked cabin in one of the water-logged schooners laid up at a near-by jetty. The door being locked and barred from the outside, the sailors who were his captors had been enjoying a good night's rest.

Dave plied the Englishman with coffee at the saloon. But what the boy had to say about his daughter sobered Bruce within a moment. His red face paled and his weak lips tightened.

"I'll shoot him down, like the dog he is!" Bruce snarled.

"No," said Dave. "We'll do better 'n that. I got it fixed."

Three or four hours later in broad daylight the carriage of the *alcalde* who was the friend of Calbuco—the carriage that had been placed at the service of the Norwegians—rolled down to the water-front, and Walstrom picked up Bruce. Then they drove to the church, where Clara joined them.

Dave Thornton was still invisible.

Rumor of what was happening reached Calbuco through his men. Pedro and Manuel and others gathered at the mansion of the Portuguese to learn what was going to happen and to guard their patron against Bruce, who was known to be reckless.

Within the hour the victoria arrived at Calbuco's door. Four persons entered the house—Walstrom, Clara, John Bruce, and the *alcalde*. Calbuco received them politely, and Pedro and others waited in an adjoining room.

"Good morning, Señor Calbuco," said the girl timidly.

"Good day, Señor Calbuco," nodded

Walstrom. "I have come to say good-by. My steamer weighs anchor at noon."

John Bruce said nothing, but his gray eyes were savage. The Portuguese looked at them all and licked his thick lips. He saw Bruce, apparently on good terms with Walstrom—Bruce, whom he had left locked in one of his schooners the night before. He bowed to Clara, who had been captive in one of his bedrooms twelve hours ago.

You see, Calbuco could not know what Clara had told her father, nor what John Bruce had told Walstrom. And he could not guess what the three of them might have confided in the *alcalde*.

He was powerless, in his present situation, to molest father or daughter. The Norwegian consul general had run down from the Chile coast to say farewell to the explorers, who were terminating their brief stay in Punta to seek the richer field of the upper Amazon; and the *alcalde* himself had been commissioned to do honor to the Scandinavians.

"And your friends," Calbuco nodded affably at Bruce and his daughter, "do they also sail on the steamer?"

"Assuredly." Walstrom took it on himself to reply. "Mr. Bruce has information regarding the mineral deposits of the straits—most interesting information."

And he looked at the Portuguese. Calbuco squirmed, thinking of the Isabella claim and the nuggets he had seen. He had never succeeded in bullying the information he wanted from the Englishman.

Moreover, his conscience made him afraid. Imprisoning Bruce might be explained to the authorities; but kidnaping the Englishman's daughter was quite a different matter. Calbuco felt that a sword was suspended over his head; yet it was his own imagination that visioned it.

If he had held his peace he might have suffered nothing. But even in his fear his greed rose up and voiced itself. While Walstrom was making his adieu Calbuco stepped nearer to Bruce.

"I was anxious to help you," he whispered. "Do not misunderstand me, my friend. What are you going to do with your claim?"

Bruce's gray eyes were hostile.

"I've been talking to Walstrom about that. I don't want to talk to you. You are a dog and a thief."

Calbuco, out of the corner of his eye, made certain that the *alcalde* had not heard this. He put his plump hand that quivered with anxiety on the other's shoulder. Mention of the Norwegian geologist in connection with the Isabella, coupled with the abrupt departure of the two men together, could mean only one thing in his mind. Bruce was selling out to Walstrom.

"I'll pay you more," he whispered, "if you'll show me the claim and let me examine it."

"How much of a fool do you think I am?" Bruce laughed. "You'll pay my price now."

Walstrom and the *alcalde* turned around. Calbuco read their faces and imagined that an enormous fine would be inflicted upon him—if Bruce had made complaint against him. The flame of his greed still warmed his brain.

"How much, Walstrom," he demanded, "do you think Señor Bruce's claim is worth?"

The Norwegian shrugged.

"Three thousand pounds," said Bruce, "to you, Calbuco."

The Portuguese still watched Walstrom, whose beard was strangely agitated, as if he were profoundly moved.

"If you work it long enough," amended the Norwegian.

"I'm selling you the biggest thing in the strait," growled Bruce. "It's on one of the western islands."

Walstrom looked at his watch and raised his brows.

"We must go," he said.

That was what decided Calbuco. If he could tempt Bruce, who was penniless, with ready cash, unseen by Walstrom, he might make the Englishman sell out. If Bruce took his money, no claim for damages could be brought against him. So he reasoned, impelled alike by caution and greed. The others, still queerly non-committal, were watching him.

At the dock Calbuco tendered Bruce a hastily drawn-up title deed to sign, and another paper indicating the location of his

claim. Bruce was to sell all riparian and mineral and other rights.

Bruce signed the deed without a smile and filled in the directions by which Calbuco was to find his new purchase, starting from a given point on the western end of the strait—on the shore where a claim-stake marked the Isabella. Calbuco's lawyer, Pedro and others witnessed this.

Walstrom did not see it because he was busy smuggling a young American aboard the steamer's launch.

When the steamer got under weigh and Punta vanished around the bend in the strait, John Bruce and his daughter sought for Dave Thornton and did not find him. Nor did Walstrom know where he was.

It was not until they assembled in the dining saloon in the evening that they discovered Dave in the white jacket of a mess-boy. John Bruce went straight to him.

"You helped us out," the Englishman said. "We're going home with a good deal of money, you know. What part of the three thousand pounds is yours?"

"Bosh!" Dave replied. "I'm working my way back to N'Yawk. Say, you don't want me to lose my job, do you—talking this way? I guess not."

One thing Dave wanted badly. He desired to see Calbuco's face when the man sought out the location that had been given him and found that he had bought the Evangelistas, lighthouse and all.

SOME REASONS

OH, I could write a poem
If I only had the time;
My soul is full of noble thoughts
And lofty, ringing rime.
But, just as soon as I sit down
And take my pen in hand—
Well, read a little further,
And I think you'll understand.

On yonder mountain's highest peak—
Hush, Johnny, let your sister speak!
Give her the doll! Now stop your crying!—
A white and fleecy cloud is lying.
No, George, the water is too cold;
A month from now. Do as you're told!—
And round the barren, purple rocks—
Oh, dear, I haven't darned those socks!—

A snow-white bird is slowly flying.
The only word that rimes is "dying."
Good gracious! Listen to those boys!
They drive me mad with all this noise.
Mary, why don't you do your scales?—
I'd like to write of woodland dales,
They sound so pleasant and so cool.
Yes, Bridget, use the one-egg rule.

Alas, my soul is ever yearning—
What can it be that I smell burning?
There now! The cake is spoiled. I knew it!
Nobody else can ever do it!
There goes the phone! Hello—yes, me!
What, coming here right now, for tea?
I guess I'll leave that noble rime
Till some day when I have more time!

Pauline D. Partridge

White Feather Weather

by John Frederick

Author of "Luck," "Cross-Roads," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

TO Jerry-on-the-Hill, the inn kept by John Northam, who fought under Cromwell, come two ladies with their coachman, who seems to be very familiar with them. He asks John Northam for a man who might escort them up to London, but the stern Puritan replies that he has no one to send. His son, however, Samson Integrity, who has caught a glimpse of the face of the younger lady, announces that he will be glad to go, which, when James Crofts, the coachman, reports, elicits from Lady Malvern the exclamation: "Go with a Northam driving? Are you mad?" And from Kate, the daughter, "I'd go with the fiend himself to get to London," which declaration is capped by her mother with, "Go on then without me. Desert me here. I ask for nothing."

CHAPTER VIII.

HOMAGE.

THE coachman banished his smile, exchanged glances with Kate and took the hand of the distressed lady.

"There is no cause for fear," he said. "The most formidable thing about this fellow is his name. God 'a' Mercy! He's called Samson Integrity! Ha, ha, ha! Samson Integrity upon my honor. But in the courtyard when the wind blew the vizard from Kate's face, he saw her. Do you remember how he stood like a stone by the door? He was entranced, I swear. 'If you serve them you will be well paid,' said I. 'Pay?' said he, looking at me so. 'I have seen her; I am paid beforehand!' Ha, ha, ha! Kate, I'll put this in your record and by my word it shall be in a tuppenny ballad two days after you reach London. 'One glance turned the limbs of the swain to marble and his heart to gold!'"

He burst again into Homeric laughter.

"Kate," sighed her mother, "at times you are useful!"

"I am glad you have found me so."

"But we can't have the fellow tagging us about in London."

"Easily handled," said the coachman. "If he grows obnoxious I'll have the colonel take a few of his brave bullies and cudgel him out of town. Or stop—he's a gentleman, and I am out of exercise. At any rate, to London first; and there you'll find that all worries cease."

"What I have always told you, my dear," murmured Lady Malvern. "Bring in the young bear-cub then, Master Crofts."

And she picked up her vizard, an example which her daughter immediately followed.

"One moment," said the coachman. "By my advice you'll let our hero see Kate alone."

"Unchaperoned!" cried the mother, and raised her fat hands in horror.

"Why not?" asked the girl calmly. "Go on, James."

"I shall be waiting at the door and will enter at the first suspicious noise. You, madam, can leave your door ajar when you retire to your own room. But see him alone she certainly must. If the first glance

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turned him to marble, the second must set the poor statue in motion. Pygmalion's rôle reversed, I say! Then take whatever course you must, Kate. I leave it to your own wit."

"Thanks," said the girl carelessly. "I think I'll come close to the truth with him."

"My dear child!" cried her mother. "Where are your wits?"

"Out, gathering ideas," said Kate. "Why not tell him—without the names? He's a gentleman. Besides, we'll never see him after we reach London. If you please, go bring him, James. We should be on the road now. The horses have rested a little, and if my father guesses what way we've come, he and my Lord Harchester will be hard at our heels."

"I think you have it," nodded the coachman. "And tell him the name of Harchester. That fellow has a nationwide fame as a *roué* and swordsman since he ran poor Vickers through. Just the reputation to make old Puritan blood boil. *Adieu*, my lady."

And he left the room and came to the impatient Samson singing the same French ballad with which he had left him.

"It needed some persuading," he explained as he led the way back toward the room. "Rather an unusual request, but the necessity is urgent, and my lady has consented."

He opened the door and stood stiffly at one side.

"Mr. Samson Integrity Northam!" he answered in a loud voice, and closed the door as Samson Integrity stepped inside.

He had seen her last by chilly moonlight, and then she had seemed pale as death; but now the ruddy firelight played softly over her. It glinted on the white cap, seeded with pearls, and gave to that pale gold hair a ruddy tint of richness; so that it seemed, when she first turned her head toward him, that her face was framed by fire. Tenderly and surely the hand of the Maker had molded that face, and left it, certainly, with the reluctance of the artist who turns at length from his masterpiece. And the glance of Samson Integrity moved down to the white triangle of the throat and bosom which showed soft and pure against the

rich blue of the gown, and over the tight sleeves which ended in tapering triangles of cloth reaching down almost to the knuckles of the hands. Most marvelous hands they were to Samson Integrity, delicately wrought, and those knuckles were shown by slight, dimpling depressions; and the fingers which drooped over the arm of the chair, surely they were not meant to do aught save idle over silken surface; aye, but he sensed a strength in them—such strength as could take hold on his heart and wring it to agony.

He saw all these things as he stood at the door with his broad hat crushed under his arm and his other hand resting on the hilt of his sword; for her eyes were cast down for a moment toward the fire—but when they lifted and met his glance, he lost sight of all else. It was like a shock which made him stand straighter; it was like a current of force which shot tingling through his blood; and if he had seen her body before he felt suddenly that now he was looking into her soul.

She glanced up—she smiled—she rose and stood by her chair, and Samson Integrity could not move hand or muscle, save to tighten his grip on the hilt of his sword.

Then her voice broke the spell, a voice low-pitched, as music should be when it enters on a theme of surpassing loveliness. It melted the ice in Samson Integrity's soul and loosed the muscles of his knees.

"If you are Samson Integrity Northam," she said, "you are he who has offered to do me a great service."

"I am Samson Integrity Northam," he answered, "and I shall serve you as far as I can."

"You have been told what must be done?"

"I must drive you to London."

"But you must know that there may be dangers."

"I must keep you from dangers," he told her and wished that he could take his eyes from her face. He was no longer sure of himself, and his breath fluttered like the wings of a stricken hawk.

"If there is any question you wish to ask me about why I am flying toward London, it is your right to be answered."

"It is a right I shall never claim," said Samson Integrity.

Excitement seemed to grow in her as she watched him; one of those hands was raised now and pressed lightly at her breast.

"But if the worst danger should come—in in an unknown cause—"

To his lips came the smile which his father had seen twice that day.

"No Northam will ever have fallen in a better cause," he said, and bowed low.

"Two men, at least, are following me. One is my father."

"Your father?" cried Samson, and his eyes widened.

"And the other is the man whom he would have me marry, Lord Harchester."

The face of Samson Integrity grew dark.

"A profane man," he said simply. "I have heard my father name him."

"A famous swordsman," she added as if she wished to test the mettle of his courage.

"He will need his skill," answered the Puritan sternly. Then in a changed tone, "For God will fight with me upon your side!"

"My name only," she said, "I do not wish to give."

"There is nothing you would withhold that I could desire."

The incredulity of the girl's expression changed to a pure wonder, and she made a little gesture toward him with both hands.

"Ah, sir," she exclaimed, "how can I reward you?"

"If my service is true, it will reward itself," said the Puritan simply. "You will tell me when the coach should be made ready?"

"Yes, yes. In an hour. No, it should be ready now."

"I will go then."

She lowered her voice so that none but he could hear.

"First—wait one moment. There is something I must say. If, hereafter, you should hear of me things which you now think unworthy—"

"I shall close my ears to them."

"And if you should hear men say—"

"My lady," said the Puritan, "I wear a sword and I shall prove with it that you are faultless."

When a man loses thought for himself his actions are possessed of a natural grace, and Samson Integrity dropped upon his knee as if he had been schooled in a court of the grand monarch. The hand which she stretched out to him trembled as he lifted it and touched it to his lips. Then he rose and backed from the room with lowered head.

But when the door closed behind him the girl remained standing with her hand still outstretched.

CHAPTER IX.

ON TO LONDON.

TO leave Jerry-on-the-Hill was not hard, but to leave it without making explanation to his father was a grim task indeed; for when he returned, there would be a fearful time of storm, but Samson Integrity decided to brave the peril. And, after all, if his conscience approved, what did the blame of his father or of all the world matter? The face of the girl was his charter of right! He followed it as Galahad followed the dream of the Holy Grail.

There is something stern in the purity of a young man's first love, unchained to the earth by any fetters of lust or any desire of possession, for his passion is beautiful and sufficient in itself, and Samson Integrity served for the sake of service, as men serve the crown without thought of lifting their hands to its jewels.

He made his few possessions into a bundle, then raised the candle above his head, stared about him at the big room, empty indeed with what he was taking from it, then left the apartment and slipped quietly down the stairs.

At the gate stood the coach with the four horses, and Tom stood at the heads of the leaders as Samson Integrity climbed up to the driver's seat. He gathered the reins taut and looked about him, from the gabled front of Jerry-on-the-Hill to the tall, dark cones of the beech-trees in the hollow and the moon-whitened meadows which rolled away beyond. It was very near that ghostly hour of midnight when grim tales begin,

and Samson Integrity felt as if the four horses beneath him were destined to carry him into the world of which his life had been the dream without any reality.

Now a door closed in the tavern, and Samson saw the three figures crossing the courtyard, the coachman with one of the ladies on either arm. He turned his face to the front as stiffly as a sentinel on guard and then heard the creaking and the slight give of the coach as the ladies entered the body of the vehicle. An instant later the coachman sprang up beside him. He was in the greatest good humor, his broad hat cocked on one side of his head, and his dark eyes sparkling.

"Ready, Tom!" he called, and tossed a coin that glinted as it whirled.

"Ready, sir," answered Tom, and stepped away from the horses' heads.

"Softly!" cautioned a voice from the interior of the coach. "We will be heard!"

"And why should we not be heard?" challenged the coachman without lowering his voice. "Gad 'a' mercy, madam, are we not on the king's highway. Hal-looo!"

And his hunting cry echoed and re-echoed from the stern face of Jerry-on-the-Hill. The horses started together at the sudden shout and burst into a full gallop down the slope; at which a muffled scream came again from within, but the strong arm of Samson Integrity pulled the team quickly to a trot. He turned to his companion.

"Master Coachman," he said grimly, "if you adventure such foolery a second time, I shall take you by the collar and pitch you into the road."

The other was not in the least perturbed.

"A fair warning," he said, "breaks no bones. I thank you from my heart, noble Samson Integrity. But what, a God's name, is that creature stalking us through the woods yonder?"

Following his gesture, Samson saw a shadowy form running through the near-by copse and keeping equal pace with them, though he could not distinguish any feature of the animal.

"It should not be a wolf," said Samson thoughtfully, "yet sometimes they range as far down as this, and what else would be running the forest on such a time?"

"Lower your voice," suggested the coachman. "For if the fat woman hears us, she'll pipe up and raise the countryside. The beast may be crazed with hunger and attack the horses. I've heard of such things in this damned wilderness of a shire."

"Take the reins," said Samson quietly, "if you can manage them with your one hand, and lend me that pistol at your belt."

"Tut, tut!" chuckled the coachman. "You would not have me think you could hit such a phantom of a target as that by this light and at such a distance?"

"If it shoots never so true," answered Samson Integrity with confidence, "I will put a bullet into yonder night-ranger. For aught I know, that may be the very cause that Mother Walker has lost so many geese lately."

The coachman made no further objection, but took the reins and surrendered the pistol. Samson raised the heavy weapon to draw a sight.

"If you hit that wolf from such a jolting place as this seat," said the coachman, leaning over to watch, "you shall have a broad guinea, my fine fellow."

"You may keep your guineas," responded Samson coldly, "but harder marks than that have been struck from the back of a running horse."

The coachman favored his companion with a quick, straight, probing glance, and fell into a sudden silence. At the same time the animal among the trees swerved suddenly toward them, and as it reached the clear Samson half rose from the seat and leveled his weapon; but he did not fire, and after a moment lowered the pistol, exclaiming, "It is Geoffrey!"

"A hound and a right noble one!" cried the coachman.

"He has never left his kennel before at night saving when he followed my father on some dangerous trip," said Samson with emotion. "He has never even followed before except when he was summoned. I cannot understand it!"

The deer-hound was now running at the side of the road, his head turned toward his master.

"Back, Geoffrey!" called Samson, "Back to the house!"

"He's a fine brute to look at, but poorly trained," remarked the coachman, for Geoffrey, though he at first slackened his long trot and glanced back toward Jerry-on-the-Hill, soon broke into a gallop and regained his former position, though now he slunk farther to the side and his tail lowered, as though he understood that he had done wrong.

"Ill-trained?" repeated Samson. "I cannot understand it. He has hitherto obeyed every glance of mine. Back, Geoffrey!"

The hound replied with a low, brief howl, but refused to alter his position.

"Perhaps the dog scents a kill," suggested the coachman much interested, "and wants to be in at the death. Well, let him be; he can do no harm. But what? You keep a pack of hounds at the tavern?"

"Geoffrey is the last of as fine a pack as ever bayed a deer in the shire," said Samson Integrity. "The rest of his blood are gone; he is the end of his line; the very last!"

The last phrase he muttered bitterly to himself. For to Samson the fine hound represented the departed glories of the house of Northam, and now a sad fancy came to him that Geoffrey had come to follow the fortunes of the last of the Northams, a solitary adherent in a hopeless struggle to regain the honor of a fallen heritage.

"Come," broke in the coachman, and he turned to his companion with an air of greater interest than he had shown before, "here we sit with many a weary mile before us and sleep joggling our elbows; tell me something of yourself, Master Northam, and I shall pay you back tale for tale, I warrant you."

"I have no will to talk," said Samson gloomily.

"Come, come!" adjured the coachman. "Do not show the prick-eared suspicion of a Roundhead. That part is out of date. What, man—a lonely road is a lonely road, and a friend is a friend even if he be only a coachman. I say it cuts me to the quick to see a noble old family like the Northams managing a damned tavern by the roadside. Why not to court, Master Northam? There are ways of coming to windward of those

who have the ear of the king. What if your father roared on the wrong side of the late troubles? Old Rowley is a kindly soul, men say; and he'll bear never a grudge. Troth, he forgets his friends as quickly as he forgets his enemies, but that's an old string and an ill one to harp on."

"Friend coachman," answered Samson Integrity coldly, "the way, as you say, is long; and I have neither strength nor will to talk."

"Why," rejoined the coachman with a perfect good nature, "I will whistle any man's tune to his measure—a jig or a death-march. Good night to you, Master Solemnity!"

And, wrapping his cloak about him, he let his chin sink upon his breast and was instantly asleep.

CHAPTER X.

THE JOURNEY.

BY morning they reached a little farmhouse, and here Samson stopped to water the horses and get food for the ladies. They would not leave the coach, but while Samson attended to the steaming horses, the coachman busied himself rousing the woman of the house and carrying out the food which she cooked. The ladies ate it in the coach, and when the horses were back in their traces the journey began again.

All day they rumbled on, but more and more slowly. For the horses were reaching the limit of their endurance. When they trotted their knees sagged, and when they walked and pulled up a grade their heads hung almost to their knees. The same weariness oppressed the travelers themselves. Now and again the elder lady opened a conversation with her companion, but it was usually limited to a very few high-pitched, almost nasal remarks, and there was rarely an answer from the girl. Samson himself was sadly worn. Into the regularity of his former life this loss of sleep cut a great breach, and as a rather warm and hazy afternoon came on he caught himself repeatedly napping and awoke with a miserable start and a sense of guilt. The coach-

man alone showed no signs of fatigue. After the final rebuff from Samson he made not the slightest attempt to reopen conversation. On the other hand he was not sullenly silent. He remained quiet not an instant. Here he stood up and whistled to Geoffrey, with whom he was on the best of terms before the morning was half worn away. There he opened a running fire of conversation at the horses for a whole ten minutes together, and it seemed to Samson Integrity that the poor, weary brutes understood his cheery nonsense and pricked their ears to listen to it. Again, a bird stooped twittering above the coach and the fellow would tilt back his head and imitate the whistle of the songster. Again he broke into song and rattled off ballad after ballad—political quips, satires, and love songs.

Toward evening it grew quite apparent that the horses could not complete the trip to London without some rest. Already it was necessary for Samson to ply the lash with a cruel liberality, and every mile or more he must draw up the team in a favorable spot and breathe them for a few minutes. During the last hours before sunset they dragged on at a pace slower than a brisk man's walk. So before dark the coachman clambered down into the body of the vehicle and held consultation with the ladies. They were loath to halt on their trip with their goal so near; for now the towers and the spires of London were plainly in view and melting away into the heart of the night. But the necessity was great, and with many a lament the corpulent lady admitted that they must put up somewhere by the road. She was chiefly persuaded by the coachman.

"For," said he, "if they were truly on our track, they would long ago have overtaken us on horseback. Why, I could run on foot two leagues to the one these poor nags are making now. Besides, our good Master Northam is ever and anon falling asleep on the seat and nodding his head off—poor lad! He may run us into the ditch, for aught I know, any moment, and leave us to kick our heels in the air."

This argument carried the day, and the coachman, who apparently knew the environs of the great city like a book, pointed out to Samson Integrity the road to an

obscurely withdrawn tavern, far from all main thoroughfares. They came thus shortly after pitch dark to the Three Rams. It had been, at one time, a great and flourishing inn where travelers who left London late often stopped over for the first night, but now the way to the northern shires had shifted farther toward the coast and the Three Rams lived on little more than its reputation. Like Jerry-on-the-Hill, it had once occupied the three sides around a courtyard, but one of these sides lay in shapeless ruins and the courtyard was open to the storm. The other two sections of the building remained in fearfully dilapidated condition, yet there were still portions of the rooms inhabitable.

Before this hostelry, then, they drew up and their whistle summoned out the stable-boy. Samson helped him to unhook the team and went with him to supervise the stabling and feeding of the nags, for it was necessary that they receive the most scrupulous attention if they were to be made fit to take the road on the following morning. When he returned to the tavern he was met by the coachman in the tap-room.

"A beastly hole, eh?" observed the cheerful fellow, who already sat at a snug corner table near the fire fronted by a bottle of wine and a generous portion of roasted beef. "I was here a twelvemonth ago and the shack was bad enough then, but since then the winter has given it another shake. Damme, but the stairs trembled when I helped the ladies to their room. One chamber between 'em, and never a sign of a bed for you and me. But, you being the son of a soldier, and I but a coachman"—here he made a wry face at the floor—"we must e'en make out with the floor of the tap-room, eh?"

"Is there no better hostelry near by?" sighed Samson, longing for a rest.

"A hundred within an hour's ride," replied the coachman, "but this is better for us. Even if they followed us on the road to London, who would ever dream of turning aside to trail us to this place? And who would look for Venus in a hovel? Tut! This scheme of mine should be marked in red; and we can all sleep in peace this night."

Indeed, Samson Integrity could hardly prop his eyes open while he swallowed a hasty meal; then he followed the example of his companion, who had wrapped himself in a cloak and lay down on the floor near the fire. That floor was already littered with sleepers, for the tavern was crowded from cellar to garret by a returning host of pleasure-seekers at a May fair. Samson had hardly laid his head upon his rolled-up cloak, which served in lieu of a pillow, when he was sound asleep; and at his feet stretched the deer-hound Geoffrey.

CHAPTER XI.

SWORDS.

SAMSON was so thoroughly exhausted that he fell into a perfectly dreamless sleep and it seemed that he had hardly closed his eyes before the familiar, low snarl of Geoffrey wakened him again. He passed from drowsiness to wakefulness the more quickly because the hard floors left him bruised in a dozen places, and he was swiftly conscious of the discomfort. Accordingly he sat up to change his position. He had attached no meaning to the growl of Geoffrey; the animal might have dreamed of the chase, but now that Samson sat up he saw a curious picture in the hall that arrested his attention.

Mine host, who was a little lean man, quite bald except for a single tuft of gray hair in the exact center of the head, stood there wrapped in a cloak which must have belonged to his wife's wardrobe and underneath it his bare, skinny shanks glistened in the light of the lantern he held. It was carried high above his head, the better to observe his nocturnal visitors. These were four men whose faces Samson Integrity could not at first make out, partly because they all wore cloaks with the collars turned up high about their faces, and partly because of the deceptive light. It was plain, however, that mine host was much alarmed, and the reason for it was not far to seek. Here and there the lantern light glittered back in sharp points; and Samson, peering more closely, made out easily that the four were armed to the teeth. One of them

dropped his hand on the shoulder of the host, apparently questioning him closely. The answer he received must have pleased him, for a coin shone yellow as he dropped it in the shaking hand of the little man. The latter, overcome by this generosity, bowed to the floor and then began obsequiously to point upward and whisper directions. The becloaked stranger nodded at length and then disappeared noiselessly up the stairs. The landlord at the same instant stepped back into another passage.

But Samson Integrity did not need the light of the lantern when he looked about him. It was already gray daylight, a chilly gloom that dripped in through the windows and half illumined the grotesque figures on the floor. By that dim light Samson stood up, donned his cloak, and buckled on his sword with hands trembling from eagerness. There was work before him which needed speed.

First he stepped to that corner of the floor where he had seen the hostler curl up for the night. This lad Samson shook by the shoulder and at the same time hissed into his ear—for one who is awakened by a hiss will never make an outcry—and it hastens the return of the senses.

"Boy," whispered Samson Integrity, "here is a shilling and another shilling. Up to your feet—no noise, mind!—and out to the stable. Harness the four grays to the big coach. Quick! Stop for nothing—not even to water the nags. Clap the harness on them. If you are speedy you win a guinea to top those shillings. If you are slow you get a cudgeling instead."

The lad closed his hand convulsively over the coins, shot a single intelligent glance at Samson, and instantly glided from the room, picking his way among the sleepers.

Not one of them had awakened, for the whispers of Samson passed unnoticed in the steady thunder of two or more formidable snorers. Next he passed to the coachman; at the first touch of his finger on the sleeping man's shoulder the latter started to his feet, his hand claspings the hilt of a dagger.

"No sound!" cautioned Samson. "If you can use a sword, belt it on and follow me. There may be need of it."

"My sword-arm, thank God, is whole,"

answered the coachman as he hastily complied with Samson's directions. "What's wrong?"

"I saw four men whispering with mine host in the hall; they paid him money and he directed them to the sleeping-rooms above. They were armed to the teeth."

"Hell and furies!" moaned the coachman softly. "Where? Where? Four, said you?"

"Four! This way!"

They were instantly in the hall and stood listening, but not a sound came from the dark stairway above them.

"Northam," whispered the coachman, "you have dreamed."

"Never! Help me close these doors and drop the bars. We must keep those fellows in the tap-room."

Luckily the broad doors shut without sound and the heavy bar was dropped into its socket. Geoffrey whined from the darkness at their feet.

"Among those you expect to follow you," said Northam, "was there one large man with a narrow, pointed gray beard?"

"Old Malvern himself! Now God 'a' mercy!"

"Courage, man!" pleaded Samson Integrity, mistaking the import of that whispered outbreak of emotion. "They are two to one, but we'll take 'em by surprise."

"Do your own part and care not for me," answered the coachman, "and this night's work will make you. Up the stairs, and we'll take 'em in the hall!"

So saying, he unsheathed his sword and started up into the darkness; at the same instant, a muffled cry sounded from the regions above. It was as if a spur had been driven into the flesh of Samson Integrity. In a single bound he passed the coachman, and sprang up to the level of the hall above.

This was a long gallery which extended down the whole length of that wing of the tavern with the doors of numerous rooms opening off from it. Several windows looked upon the courtyard on the other side, and through these apertures streamed the growing but uncertain light of the new dawn. As Samson reached this hall, through one of the doors to the left and toward the

farther end of the corridor, two black figures forced out a third form in white between them, and almost immediately a second trio issued in the same manner and turned down the hall.

"On them!" called a voice at Samson's shoulder; and whipping out his sword as he ran, Samson Integrity raced toward his first combat.

"Two of 'em!" shouted one of the men before him. "Tom, mind the women! Harchester, Grantley, at 'em, lads!"

And three swords flashed in the dim light of the gallery. It was the big man of the pointed gray beard who gave the commands, and he stood now a little in advance of his companions in the full shaft of morning light which broke through a near-by window. He was to the left of the others and therefore more on a line with the coachman who raced not a step behind Samson; so the latter bore straight down upon the central figure of the trio.

To run blindly upon two bare swords, however, was certain death which skill could not avoid, and though a red passion half blinded Samson, the glitter of the steel brought him to his senses when he was almost within lunging distance of the two. Without slackening his speed he leaped far to the left, his shoulder crashing into the wall, and thrust at the man directly before him. In spite of the unexpected change of direction the fellow had presence of mind and speed of hand to parry. His blade rang on that of Samson and forced it up. An ounce more of pressure in that parry would have saved him. As it was, he deflected the point from his breast, but it entered his shoulder; and with the lunge of Northam's body behind it drove through to the very hilt.

The fellow screamed terribly as he fell and clutched at his wound, while his rapier rattled on the floor.

"Let the wenches be, Tom!" he cried, writhing where he dropped. "Here am I dying! Help!"

His fall had disengaged the blade of Samson Integrity in the very nick of time, for the central man of the trio thrust full in Samson's face and he was only able to knock the danger above his head by jerking

up his hilt. A leap back carried him into fighting position and he fell on guard in time to put aside the next lunge of his opponent.

"Brave lad! Brave lad!" cried a voice beside him, and he glanced across toward the coachman, who was furiously engaging the man whom he had called Malvern.

The latter had every advantage of height and reach, yet the coachman kept him in play without the slightest apparent difficulty. Indeed, he seemed to fight with his head turned to watch Samson's progress; yet his address with his blade was a revelation to the young Puritan.

"Keep Harchester off while I finish the old 'un!" he called again, and even as he spoke he got past the guard of Malvern.

The elder man dropped his rapier with a deep curse and sprang back, grasping his right forearm with his other hand. His place was instantly filled by the man called Tom, who had left the women in a huddled group at the farthest end of the gallery; but Tom, though he fought with a headlong vim which gave his attack some venom, was by no means a match for the dangerous grace of the coachman.

In the mean time Samson Integrity found himself engaged by a veritable master of fence. It was a man of about his own stature—a fellow with proudly curved mustache and one of those dainty little tufts of beard in the center of the lower lip which were affected by the court at Whitehall. There was no effeminacy about his arm, however; he put by the sword of Samson with a wrist of steel, and his own attack was both swift and sustained. He fought with the confidence of one who has often faced the naked point and took chances which, to the uninitiated on the field of honor, would have seemed suicidal.

But Samson Integrity at first forgot every lesson in fence that he had learned from the cunning foil of his father. There on the floor, writhing in what might be his death agony, lay his first antagonist; and the sight froze the blood at Samson's heart.

Moreover, he was overwhelmed with awe at the thought of facing no less a person than Lord Harchester. For tales of dueling ran everywhere through England, and the

doings of the fencers in Lincoln's Inn Fields sounded again in each tap-room. No name was more frequently on the lips of the raconteurs than that of Lord Harchester. That very sword, perhaps, had pierced young Vickers, not three months before.

At this point in his troubling reflections, Samson followed a feint with both sword and eye, and the inevitable result was that his opponent's point was the next instant past his guard. He parried, indeed, but it was a close call, and he felt cold steel pierce his jacket and slither down his side.

Lord Harchester snarled under his breath as he lunged; and cursed when he stepped back with unreddened blood.

That touch changed the complexion of the battle. It had been the very touch of death, so to speak, and after it, Samson Integrity thrilled with unspeakable joy to find that his fear was gone. His blood flowed warm again; his heart beat true; the weakness which was unstringing his knees departed.

He leaped like a tiger at Harchester. A feint at the body and a thrust at the face which Harchester barely managed to put by gave him the aggressive, and the next lunge of the duelist Samson put by as his father had taught him to do—so that it missed his head by the merest fraction of an inch, and he replied with a counter-thrust which Harchester avoided only by suddenly twisting his body half-way round.

It gave Samson a chance to flash a glance at the coachman in time to see the latter finish his second man. On half a dozen occasions already the coachman had had the life of Tom at his mercy, and each time he had failed to send home the finishing stroke. But now, rising from a low lunge with catlike swiftness, he caught the right arm of his opponent outside his sword elbow and struck the poor fellow squarely along the side of the head with his hilt. Tom went down like a steer under the ax—with a single indrawn breath and no other sound. The coachman turned to young Northam.

"Holloa!" he cried. "Brave Master Samson! But stand back. Harchester is for my blade. Harchester, you unspeakable villain, remember Vickers!"

"Who are you?" panted Harchester. "Man or devil, come both of you!"

"No, no! Equal odds!" cried Samson Integrity. "By the grace of our Father, punishment for your sins will this day overtake you, Lord Harchester."

"What's here?" panted Harchester. "Some nameless Roundhead loon?"

"One that will roundly finish off his words with equal deeds, Sinclair. Back, sir!"

This to Malvern, who had picked up his fallen sword in his left hand and now made a clumsy rush from the side.

"Lower your point," commanded the coachman, putting aside the thrust with contemptuous ease, "or I'll spit you in spite of your years!"

The elder man stepped back with a groan at his helplessness.

"Good speed! Speed, Master Samson!" cried the coachman. "The house is raised."

Indeed, there was a crash of splintering wood from the lower portion of the tavern; an ample announcement that the men of the tap-room had broken clear. Up to that point Samson Integrity had pressed his attack warmly, but he had held his hand from any of those deadly tricks of fences which he had learned from the subtle blade of John Northam. The whole engagement had filled hardly more than a few seconds, but before the end of that time he felt the thrilling assurance that the life of Harchester lay within his power. And he dalled with that assurance as the cat plays with the mouse.

Harchester himself seemed to know that he faced his master. The sneering scorn of his earlier attitude was now quite gone, and as he thrust and parried his mouth grinned with the violence of his efforts and his forehead glistened with perspiration.

He now met the call of the coachman by delivering a last desperate assault at Samson Integrity. His steel became a flicker of dancing marsh-light darting at the tall Puritan, and in the end he concluded his assault with a peculiar high thrust, his hilt driving apparently straight at the face, but the point deflecting down toward the body. He failed, his sword flung wide by Samson's strong parry.

"Come on' and be damned!" shouted Harchester, and fell back a pace on guard.

What ensued the eye could not follow. It seemed that Samson Integrity was literally flinging his naked body on the point of Harchester's sword; yet that steel did not reach its mark. In an instant Samson was at half-sword distance, and from this he leaped suddenly back. As he did so, his sword-blade clanged against that of Harchester and then twined about it; the force of his backward spring wrenched the weapon from the nobleman's hand and sent it flying far down the corridor.

"Bravo, by Heaven!" shouted the coachman. "Finish the dog, Samson! He showed Vickers no mercy."

But Samson could not drive home the fatal stroke.

"Live," he said, "and remember! You, coachman, get the ladies and start with them down the hall."

He stopped and snatched a pistol from the belt of his first foe, who now lay quiet and groaning on the floor.

"The first man that moves," he said, "is no better than dead! My Lord Harchester, as you are a man of honor you will not attempt to interfere again with our retreat."

But Harchester, in an agony of shame and rage, turned to the wall and buried his face in his upflung arms. In the mean time the two ladies were hurrying toward the coachman, but in passing Malvern the girl ran to him and caught his unwounded arm.

"Dear father," she cried swiftly in an undertone which Samson Integrity barely heard, "forgive me if you can, but do not follow me. It is useless."

Her father thrust her roughly away.

"Wench," he said, "if you could coin your blood drop by drop into words, all the blood in your body could not win me to forgive you. And follow you I shall—to Whitehall—or to hell!"

"Haste! Haste!" urged the coachman, taking her arm. "They are coming up the stairs!"

And he hurried the two down the length of the hall. Behind them, at a more moderate pace, followed Samson, backing up, with the pistol steadily leveled at the dis-

comfited pair. Poor Tom was sitting up, groaning, and holding his head in both hands.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ESCAPE.

THEY were close to the end of the hall when Samson heard one of the women before him scream. It was useless, at least for a moment, to keep guard on Harchester and Malvern at the farther end of the corridor; so Samson Integrity whirled and ran up beside his companions. They were at the head of the narrow stairs, and down the flight, tossing with the light of several lanterns, Samson saw mine host, still in his wife's cloak, furiously inciting a crowd of men to storm the stairs.

"Ale for you all, as much as you can drink for a fortnight!" cried the little man, who evidently saw some rich reward slipping through his fingers. "And a broad guinea for the man who downs one of 'em—one of the ravishers! Who's the man for merry England and the honor of England's lasses?"

The excitement of breaking from the tap-room, the tumult in the middle of the night, had by this time roused the crowd to a high pitch of wrath, and now with a great bellow half a dozen of them rushed for the stairs. Their very numbers were against them. They wedged and lodged in the narrow passage, cursing and striking at one another. Some one, frantic with the fumes of last night's ale or the peril of the instant, fired a pistol into the ceiling; then the whole mass of men stumbled on up the stairs.

"In the name of God, good friends, brave gentlemen!" cried the girl, and yet there was a certain dignity even in her terror. "Are we lost? Is there nothing left to do?"

"Hell and furies!" groaned the coachman in his favorite oath. "We'll back into the hall and try another exit. Kate! Kate! Was ever such cursed ill-fortune?"

Samson Integrity glanced back into the hall in time to see Tom stumble to his feet and pick up his sword; old Malvern had raised a pistol, and now they came on together toward the fugitives. It would have

been sheer insanity to retreat and be caught between two fires. An old maxim of his father's came into the mind of Samson, "When in doubt on the field of battle, charge the enemy in his face!"

"Coachman," he said, "keep close to the ladies and follow me as you love life and honor and reward."

"Up, up, lads, and at 'em!" shouted half a dozen voices from the mass of humanity which struggled up the long stairs.

"The old danger comes behind; there is only this way left. After me and swiftly!" And with this parting admonition Samson Integrity fixed a final glance at the pale, set countenance of the girl, and then turned and, reversing his sword so that the blade thrust up beyond his shoulder, and the hilt was like a cudgel in his fist, he sprang full in the faces of the ascending crowd. There were knives and swords in that little crowd, and in any open space Samson could not have lasted for the space of one breath against them. As it was, the surprise of the attack, its suddenness, the steepness of the narrow stairs, all worked in his favor. Down rolled the struggling mass toward the lower hall. A gun exploded, some one screamed, faces appeared before Samson and arms were raised against him, but he smote them down with short, cruel blows of the hilt of his sword.

In the winking of an eye it was over. One or two lay sprawling and crushed on the stairs; the remainder stumbled in wild confusion, fighting each other in the hall below as the coachman rushed through with the two women on his arms. Samson Integrity followed them through the door. And they saw, in front of the tavern's ruinous courtyard, two coaches and four; a stable-boy holding the heads of their own leaders.

There was still need of haste. The pursuit burst with a roar out of the tavern and rolled after them; a bullet whizzed overhead. Upper windows were thrust up and men and women shouted and screamed at the hubbub. But oddly enough, in the race for the coach the plump Lady Malvern was the winner and bounced into the vehicle with the agility of youth. Her daughter whipped in after her; Samson slammed the door and leaped onto the driver's seat,

where the coachman had already gathered the reins. The leaders, by this time, were rearing with nervous excitement, and the moment the stable-boy stepped away from their heads they burst into a gallop, Samson wielding the lash of the long whip wickedly. A red-faced fellow leaped up on the side of the coach and thrust his pistol in the very face of Samson; but the latter swung back the butt of his whip and knocked the man headlong back to the ground. A second later the coach was bowling along at full speed.

They whisked around a corner and down a long hill, but climbing the opposite side they looked back and saw the coach of the pursuers whirling over the top. Four men sat wedged in the driver's seat, among them Harchester, standing erect and lashing the furiously racing horses. From the windows appeared other heads; the vehicle was literally packed with the enemy.

"They'll never reach us!" cried the coachman, standing up to watch and clapping his hands with joyous excitement. "Ah, Master Northam, a king's ransom couldn't buy this merry morning!"

"I'll wind the horses," said Northam coolly, "if I run them up this hill. When we strike the level they'll overtake us."

"No, no!" cried the coachman. "You're mad."

"I can tell by the action of that team," answered Samson calmly, "that they are far faster than this one." He drew a long breath and then said softly through his teeth, "Look back to my Lord Harchester!"

"A fine picture of a man, eh?" echoed the coachman. "His hat off, his hair flying, and hell in his heart—poor Harchester! I'd rather be dead indeed than face what he must live through. How they'll laugh when the story goes abroad! His lady run away from him; his sword knocked from his hand by a—ha, ha, ha! God have mercy on poor Harchester, for the wits will have none!"

"I set him on his parole," said the Puritan grimly. "I spared him his life on promise that he would not further interfere with us this day. And he has broken his word."

"Tut, tut, lad! Harchester has made kindling of his honor a dozen times—and redeemed it in Lincoln's Inn Fields! Bear with him now. The poor fellow is mad with injured vanity. Faith, I'll wager his wrist aches; but where did you learn that trick of the twisted swords? If I could show that to George, I'd break his damned proud heart with envy!" He broke off with an exclamation of dismay. "By the blue heavens!" he cried. "They *are* gaining on us! The lash, the lash, Master Northam!"

As they reached the level, the following coach, indeed, bowled over the hilltop behind them; a gun exploded and a bullet whistled over their heads.

"It 'll take more than that, my hearties, to make this ship heave to," said the coachman. "Name of God, Northam! Will the nags do no better than that?"

In fact, the horses were extended to their full speed, and the coach reeled drunkenly; and sometimes they heard the moaning voice of Lady Malvern at her panic-stricken prayers. But still the pursuers gained, and swiftly.

They dipped down a long incline.

"Here," said Northam, rising, "take the reins."

And he lifted his pistol.

"Not at this distance," pleaded the coachman, looking back. "You'll waste the bullet and God knows we have need of our powder."

Northam drew a careful sight, but at length he lowered his gun with a sigh.

"He has broken his plighted word," he said, "and he is even now placing the life of the lady in jeopardy, yet I cannot kill him."

"Nay, if you can hit the mark, my bully boy," cried the coachman, "shoot him down like a dog, and be damned to him!"

"I cannot do it!" muttered Samson Integrity. "If he were sword to sword to me—yes, but to take a human life by the pressure of a trigger—it is too horrible. Besides, his death might not stop them."

"Never a fear of that. The pack will quit when the leader drops. Yet, I'd rather see Harchester alive and laughed at than dead and forgotten. God 'a' mercy, lad, how they gain on us!"

The coach of Malvern had now dipped into the same slope as that along which the fugitives ricocheted at such terrific speed, and with every leap of the horses the danger drew nearer. A man on the seat beside Harchester was making ready a long fowling piece for a chance shot.

"She is lost unless I fire," said Samson. He continued after a moment with great emotion, "Master Coachman, you are my witness; if our lives alone depended, I would not fire, but her happiness—"

The coachman regarded his companion with a blank look of astonishment, but said not a word. The pistol raised in the hand of Samson Integrity was leveled, his face set sternly, and he fired. The coachman had fixed his glance on the form of Harchester, but that was not Samson's target. The near horse in the lead team of the pursuers reared up as if he were about to jump an obstacle, then pitched headlong down, lifeless. Over him the other horses toppled in terrible confusion—the front wheels of the coach struck the living mass, and the tall vehicle heaved up and then toppled flat upon its side, flinging the men on the driver's seat many a yard into the field near by. One hoarse, shrill, tingling scream of horror rose from the wreck, then the observers whipped out of sight around the corner of a dense grove of beeches.

Samson was white indeed as he resumed his seat and took the reins.

"The enemy is fallen," he said in a shaken voice. "The hand of the Lord has smitten the Philistine!"

"Now the devil be my master!" muttered the coachman. "It's an ill day when a man crosses your path, Master Samson Northam."

And he sat for a long time in a most unaccustomed silence.

CHAPTER XIII.

TREASON.

THAT silence lasted with hardly a break for hour after hour, the coachman looking thoughtfully into the distance and Samson Integrity sternly observant of his work. It was some time after noon be-

fore they reached the environs of London, and the welcome sight loosed the tongue of the coachman. He seemed perfectly familiar with every street and lane; and when they passed the outskirts and struck into the heart of the city he began to talk of the greater houses which they passed as if he knew the master of each. A thing to be remembered of servants, Samson thought to himself, is that they love to dwell familiarly on the names of the great.

In the mean time he drank in the chatter of his companion. Indeed, it was as if he had stepped into a new world. Some urchins on the street shouted after him a laughing remark about his clothes; a flower-girl ran from the side of an alley and tossed a blossom into his lap; it was a new world, a new life of gaiety. The memory of what had happened on the road faded from Samson's mind; and when he glimpsed the spires of a great church, his heart leaped up in a like aspiration.

So they came at length to the goal of their journey. It was a very tall house with a dark, forbidding front, the hotel of a celebrated nobleman in the days of the first Stuart, as the coachman told Samson Integrity, but since then much altered both in form and in fortune; for now it was owned by a tight-fisted old fellow named Godfrey Lawrence who kept it as a lodging-house. Men and ladies of high blood or fat purses, or both, occupied the more spacious chambers, and the meaner sort were filled with every manner of low fellows and even the women of the streets. A communication which made the blood of Samson Integrity turn cold when he thought of the girl whom he had brought with him.

"If it is such a house as this," frowned Samson, "we will not stay here even an instant. There must be other and cleaner lodging-places in London town."

He had stopped the coach, but now he gathered up the reins again.

"Fine scruples are an excellent garb in the country, lad," said the coachman contemptuously, "but here in London they wear through very soon at the elbows. Lay down your reins. All arrangements are already made to lodge the ladies here. Hi, fellow, hold the nags."

A ragged old man instantly stepped to the heads of the leaders, and at the same time the coachman sprang down and opened the door to the coach. While he was assisting the ladies out Samson clambered slowly, regretfully down.

He had heard tales of London town, and the hideous fate of innocent, misled ladies!

Before he could bring himself out of the shadow of his gloomy thoughts, however, the coachman had passed up the steps of the building and was now admitted with his two companions into a long, high, dark hall. Samson followed reluctantly, and a sallow-faced servant closed the door behind them.

The coachman called for the master of the house, for the entire party was weary from the journey and needed rest in their rooms. Samson hardly waited until the servant was out of hearing before he voiced his suspicions.

"Madam," he said to the elder lady, "I like not this house, neither the air of it, nor the men who keep it. If my word has the weight of a feather in your judgment, I pray that you find some other lodging. My reasons—"

It seemed to Samson that some sign passed swiftly between the coachman and the lady.

"In the name of heaven, good friend," she said impatiently, "do not give me reasons now. Sleep is what I need."

At this rather sharp rebuff Samson drew back a pace, and at the same time a rat-faced man appeared down the hall and was instantly engaged in conversation by the coachman; he began to bow and scrape at once. While they talked the girl stepped close to Samson. The vizard which she wore in traveling was still drawn over the upper portion of her face; and though her eyes were unobscured, it seemed to Samson Integrity as though he were looking at her through a veil.

"If my mother is round with you," she said, "forgive her. In the morning she will crave your forgiveness herself, Master Northam, and I, also, shall try to thank you."

There was about as much formalism as there was graciousness in this speech, and Samson's heart sank still further.

"On my honor," he said hastily, "I do not think of myself. But"—and he drew a little closer to her and lowered his voice—"let me speak six words openly. You put strange trust in this servant." He gestured contemptuously toward the coachman. "No matter how long his family may have been in your service"—here he thought he detected the faintest quiver of mirth about the lips of his masked lady—"no matter how long he has served you, there is something in him, madam, which I, for one, would not trust."

She had grown serious quickly before the end of his speech.

"What have you learned?" she whispered. "What has raised your suspicions? God knows, I am in peril enough!"

Her fear was like wine to Samson Integrity.

"If you are in danger," he said, "put your trust in me. Lean on my honor! Whatever I have or am is yours!"

"Ah!" said the girl. "I know you are strong. I have seen it." She shuddered suddenly at the memory. "And brave, truly. But there are dangers in London for which strength and courage are no shield."

"Name them!" he whispered in an agony of anxiety. "Test me, but do not lay everything, as you seem to do, in the faith of this nameless—coachman!"

The same quiver of mirth touched the lips of the girl, and the sight of it saddened and angered Samson at the same time. She saw his flush and laid her hand impulsively on his arm.

"Do not be angered," she said. "I value you higher than you can dream, and if I cannot tell you what you wish to know it is not because I do not trust you first, and every man I know after you!"

A great warmth of sincerity breathed through her voice and the blood jumped in Samson's heart.

She ended with an almost plaintive note: "You are not angered?"

"Listen," said the Puritan solemnly. "Before I give up your service I shall give up my faith in you; and when I give up my faith in you I shall give up my faith in man and woman. This much I feel: that you are facing some great peril, and

facing it blindly—a greater danger here in London than you faced in the tavern on the road. And while you are here, I shall follow you like a shadow—everywhere!”

He had seen that she was moved by the first part of his speech, but when he ended she was grown thoughtful, and her eyes looked down. He waited for an answer, but at this moment the coachman broke in, “We have been expected, my lady, as I told you. The rooms are ready. For Master Northam, he can share mine until another is vacant.”

They passed up two long, winding flights of stairs to the rooms of the two women; the master of the house merely set the doors ajar and indicated them; but he went on to the apartment of the coachman and stepped in with him. It was a very large room, with a great four-poster draped in blue cloth and several chairs, apparently hand-carved and after the manner of the French. On the whole, it was the most sumptuous bed-chamber that Samson Integrity had ever looked upon.

“I hope,” said the master of the house, “that you will find comfort here, sir.”

And he bowed and twisted his lean fingers together in great anxiety. The coachman glanced carelessly about.

“It will do,” he said. “Be off to the ladies, old Mammon, and find out if there’s anything they need; and if you let ’em go unattended in so much as a glass of chocolate, I’ll flay you and tan your hide for a money-bag.”

To the astonishment of Samson Integrity the landlord took this insolent outbreak in the utmost good humor.

“Good, sir,” he chuckled, bowing himself out. “You are pleased to be merry. Bless you, sir; very good indeed!”

“Be off and be damned!” answered the coachman, flinging himself back on the cushions which littered a couch at one side of the room. “Run to the ladies and carry me back their commands.”

The old man literally jumped back through the door, and they heard him hobbling swiftly down the hall.

“Old skinflint,” said this extraordinary coachman. “Damn him for a bloodsucking leech that’s reduced many a gallant fellow

to skin and bones. Slattery was the last that went down before him. Poor Slattery! I won a thou—”

But here he noted the bulging eyes of Samson Integrity and broke off short. “An infernal old hell-spirit,” he muttered in conclusion.

The door was here thrust ajar and the rat-faced landlord looked in on them again.

“The ladies pray a word with you, sir,” he said.

“I will be with them instantly,” rejoined Samson, starting up.

“Nay, nay,” answered the old man, shaking his head violently. “It’s him they want!”

And he bestowed upon the coachman a grin which brought the tip of his nose and his hooked chin in close juxtaposition.

“They want me?” said the coachman, yawning. “Aye, never a thought for the weariness of a man. My bones may ache for sleep, but devil a bit do they care so long as they lounge in silks. But the longest way round is the shortest way home, most like. Ah ha!”

And with a short, deep chuckle he left the room. Samson, somewhat perturbed, began to pace up and down the floor; but the coachman returned soon bearing a small pitcher and two glasses.

“The old lady—the fat one,” he said irreverently, “has had a thought for us after all. She’s sent us a glass of spiced wine.”

He poured the glasses full and raised his own.

“I rarely taste wine,” returned Samson. “It turns the brain to muddy water.”

“But this,” said the coachman, growing serious, “is a sleeping draft—doctors highly commend it.”

“Well,” said Samson, whose bones ached at the very mention of sleep, “I shall taste it.”

“A toast,” announced the coachman, posing his glass, “to forgetfulness.”

And he smiled at Samson.

“To forgetfulness?” echoed Samson Integrity. “A strange toast, Master Coachman!”

“And why not?” countered the other, grown suddenly grim. “And why not?”

Why not forgetfulness? Lethe itself, say I, is the sweetest draft that lips can touch. Show me the queen of ladies or the prince of good fellows who would not wipe out nine-tenths of his life and start with a clean slate! I tell you, sir, I have known men of royal blood who would gladly forget it, because the purple is mixed with dregs of the gutter—the bar sinister across their lives. So, I say again, we'll drink to forgetfulness."

"Very well," said Samson absent-mindedly, but his eyes wandered afar and dwelt on some image of his own choosing.

The coachman stepped closer, clinked his glass with that of Samson, and the Puritan drained his potion with one swallow.

"Phaugh!" he exclaimed with a slight shudder. "Bitter stuff!"

"True," nodded the coachman.

And Samson saw that the glass of his companion gave no evidence of having been tasted.

"Too bitter for me," continued the coachman, setting down his goblet on the table. "Besides, I can sleep without it."

It seemed to Samson that he was seeing

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

the other through a veil, and a peculiar whirling set up in his brain. Moreover, through the mist it seemed to him that the coachman watched him with a rather mocking smile. A horrible fear burst upon him.

"Fellow!" he cried, "take up your own glass, and drain it to the dregs or I'll spit you like a toad!"

"So harsh?" smiled the coachman. "Good Master Samson, I'm in no such hurry to sleep. I shall not drink the wine, and I give not that for your sword!"

And he snapped his fingers under the very nose of the Puritan.

"Treason!" cried Samson hoarsely. "Treason and murder! Help, ho!"

But he knew, even as the words came, that his voice was no louder than a whisper. He drew his sword, but the coachman made no move toward self-defense. He had no need, for the hilt slipped from the numbed fingers of Samson and crashed upon the floor. Gathering the last remnants of his fading strength he struck full at the face of the coachman, but a curtain of solid blackness dropped over his eyes and he knew no more.



Brass Buttons

By Rebecca T. Hodges

PRETTY, charming Ruth Chester, blond of hair and blue of eyes, drove her snappy roadster slowly up alongside the row of smart little shops on the exclusive Circle. Each parking spot

was already filled by the electrics or sedans or limousines whose owners were inside the lingerie or hat or corset bowers where she longed to be.

Ruth puckered her pretty brows for a

moment in perplexity, and then, with her engines still running, opened the car door and stepped out.

"I'll only be just a minute," she thought, giving a quick glance about. "I'll take the chance," and she dashed across the pavement into the hat-store.

But one minute to Ruth could mean one—or as easily fifteen. So when she came out later, bearing in her hand a big flowered bandbox tied with the lavender and gold ribbon she gave a little gasp of dismay, for on her wind-shield was pasted a bit of paper.

She knew what it meant—the summons to appear in police court the following morning. And by the machine on a restively plunging horse sat a traffic officer.

Gloom settled on her shoulders as she noted the stony-jawed face.

"You know better than that, young lady." The man's voice was as uncompromising as his features. "You ain't got no business leaving your car out in the middle of the street with the engine going full tilt."

"Oh, dear me!" Ruth's eyes rolled imploringly. "Oh, officer, I was only there just one minute, and there wasn't any place to park."

"Can't help that," he retorted shortly. "Orders is orders. We're going to get after you folks. The lieutenant says this slidin' by all rules has got to stop, that's all," and he handed her the summons.

"But I can't go to court to-morrow!" Ruth expostulated.

"You can't!" He laughed sarcastically. "Well, you'd better if you know what's good for you."

"But I can't," she repeated. "I'm going down to the races!"

"Huh! Well, you show up, just the same," he warned, writing down in his note-book the number of her car. "Name and address," he ordered curtly.

"Ruth Chester," she said, her cheeks flaming, "4040 Arlington."

"You be on hand," the officer admonished, moving off down the street.

"The mean old thing!" she cried hotly to herself. "Of all the fool stunts!"

She closed the door and, placing the

bandbox on the seat beside her, turned the car toward home.

"I wish I'd never bought the hat. But I'm going to Kentucky, just the same!" she resolved.

As the corner cop came into view at the next street Ruth realized it was the smiling, genial Foley. Blarney was his middle name, and like all true sons of Erin a pretty face and the lure of feminine wiles were often his delight and undoing.

So, with renewed courage, Ruth drew her car up beside him.

"Oh, Foley!" she exclaimed, holding out the summons. "Just see what's here!"

"Ain't that a devil of a mess, Miss Chester!" he lamented ruefully. "What 'd you let 'em do it for?"

"Oh, I couldn't help it, Foley," she confessed. "You see I just ran in to *madame's* to get my new hat, and there wasn't one single place to park—and I hurried in and left my engine running—and when I came out that beastly man had stuck that thing on my wind-shield and said I have to go to police court to-morrow at nine—and I can't!" She paused breathlessly.

"But I guess you'll have to." Foley scratched his head reflectively. "There's nothin' else for it."

"But I can't!" she insisted. "To-morrow at nine I'll be on the train for Louisville. I'm going to the races. You see—"

She flashed a plaintive glance at him and shrugged her shoulders, while the dimple in her cheek deepened.

"Why didn't you look at him that way?" Foley questioned bluntly, as the traffic swung past in endless streams at his beckoning hand. "Any man would take the shirt off his back," he assured her boldly, "for a smile like that."

"I did, Foley," Ruth affirmed, laughing. "But it didn't do any good."

Foley grinned. "His coffee probably didn't agree with him this morning," he decided. "Anyhow," he continued thoughtfully, "he's spilled the beans. He's got your name, and you'll have to let the races go and show up. But, say," he went on, "wait a minute, Miss Chester. There's just one thing you could do. Go on down

now to the police station and see Captain Corrigan yourself. He's Irish, like me, and perhaps you can fix it up with him. Lieutenant Lawton's too hard-boiled—but Corrigan's all right."

"You're a sweet angel," Ruth announced. "I'm going to Kentucky—you'll see," she promised with a friendly wave to the unbiased exponent of justice.

Miss Chester, in her dainty shoes and silken gown, walked into the dingy dirty corridor of the police station between rows of heavy-footed detectives who eyed her appraisingly.

Heading toward the most imposing figure behind the fencelike enclosure, Ruth smiled designly and said, "I'd like to see Captain Corrigan, please."

"He ain't here, miss," the burly giant assured her. "But Lieutenant Lawton's in there. Perhaps he'd do," and he waved a pudgy hand in the direction of an inner office.

Still clutching the offending summons, with a demure lift of her violet eyes Ruth advanced beyond the door.

As she stepped within his line of vision a man, young and firm of lip, straight of limb, and broad of shoulder, rose quickly to his feet.

"Take this chair, madam."

He motioned toward the one by the side of his desk, and, closing the door on the interested listeners in the outer office, seated himself before her.

"And now what can I do for you?" he asked, leaning forward and clasping his fingers over his knees.

"I just knew I'd come to the right place," Ruth sighed thankfully. "None of those men out there would have the least sense, I'm sure. It's just this, captain," and she thrust the paper into his hands.

"H-m! I see," Lawton smiled. "What did you do?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing! I could not park my car, and I only ran in a minute to get my new hat. When I came out that horrid traffic officer told me I'd have to appear in court to-morrow morning. And he was really mean about it, too!"

"Not rude, I hope!" Lawton cut in quickly.

"Oh, no—I don't suppose so—just cross and stern and dreadfully persistent."

"Did you shut off your engine?" he asked.

"No."

"Ah, my dear young lady, that's where the trouble comes," Lawton explained re-provingly. "You are far too clever a woman not to realize, I'm sure, that cars must be handled cautiously. We have had too many accidents lately. You knew the rules?"

"Yes." She hesitated, and then with a quick smile added, "But I was only there a second!"

"I'm sorry," Lawton smiled back, "but we have to tighten up. Rules and regulations must be enforced. Anyway, since this is your first offense, you won't get it too hard from the judge in the morning."

"But I can't come," Ruth persisted, opening her blue eyes wide. "I'm going down to Lexington for the races, and I must be on my way by nine to-morrow."

Lawton shrugged his shoulders and looked at her quizzically.

"What about this?" he queried, smoothing out the crumpled summons. "This is as binding as the laws of the Medes and Persians, you know."

"That's just why I came to you," Ruth smiled again. "Don't tell me that a man like you, loaded with all those brass buttons and things—a big, strong man—can't do something with a scrap of old paper that will let me go on down to Kentucky!"

Lawton watched the sunlight stream through the dust-smeared windows and bring out the golden crinkles in the hair that shone in soft little puffs over her ears. He noted that the cornflower-blue of her hat matched the violet eyes, and realized that the fresh pinkness of her cheeks was only outdone by the richness of her curving lips.

He took in all this, and listened as she went on:

"You see, captain, it isn't as though it were just an automobile race or a boat race, or anything ordinary like that. This is a horse race—the famous Lexington Trots,

you know—and I'm from Kentucky—and—well—you see how it is! I just have to go!"

She paused and pouted alluringly.

"You love a good horse, now don't you, captain?"

"I sure do," he laughed. "I'm a Kentuckian myself—but I'm not captain," he hastened to explain. "Just lieutenant."

"How stupid of the force!" she cried demurely. "You ought to be a general at least—a man with your intelligence!"

They both laughed, but Ruth still watched with inward uneasiness as Lawton glanced every so often at the paper. She remembered what Foley had said about his being "hard-boiled."

Kentucky and horses seemed a safe topic, so she flew back to solid ground.

"When you see them pull on the bit and stretch out round the track—doesn't it just thrill you to death!" she cried.

Lawton grinned boyishly.

"And then when the bell rings! And the cheering crowds! Oh, Lord!" he sighed, leaning back in his chair.

"I tell you what to do," Ruth suddenly propounded. "Why don't you go to the races yourself? Then you could easily forget that I was supposed to be here!"

"No." He shook his head slowly. "I'd like to. Lord, how I'd like to! You see," he confided, "I come from Danville. So I know just how you feel."

"Do you really!" Ruth exclaimed in unfeigned delight. "Then you know the Abbots and the Martindales, I suppose. My home was in Lexington."

"For the love of Pete!" Lawton ejaculated. "Sure, I know them all. I'm Fred Lawton."

Ruth thrust out a warm, impulsive hand.

"How heavenly!" she squealed. "I'm Ruth Chester—the Doanes' cousin."

Chattering and laughing and comparing notes, they talked on, while Lawton fell deeper and deeper under the spell.

Suddenly Ruth asked, "What is your verdict, officer?"

"Well, I'll tell you," he answered deliberately. "Go on to your races. Heaven knows I envy you, and we'll postpone the case until you come back."

"But, my very dear Mr. Lawton," Ruth wailed, "you know I wouldn't have one minute's rest or peace or fun, with that thing hanging over my head. Now you, with all your persuasive influence"—she looked him full in the face—"can fix it so that I don't have to come back here at all."

With sparkling eyes and beguiling lips this daughter of Eve waited.

Lawton grinned sheepishly and fell.

"I suppose we Kentucky men are eternally handicapped," he admitted. "Our love for our blue-grass horses and women continually leads us astray."

He tore the offending paper to shreds and dropped the scraps into the wastebasket.

"You nice, nice thing!" She smiled rapturously. "I knew all along you were an officer and a gentleman."

"I'll have to fix it somehow with Delaney," he declared. "If we had more like him, though, we'd soon get rid of pests that break the parking laws."

"Like me," she added, gaily exuberant.

"Yes, like you," he retorted.

"And now I'll tell you such a funny thing that happened to me lately. I had parked my car too long in one place 'way down-town in front of a store, and when I came out there was a hateful slip telling me to show up at court! What do you suppose I did?"

Lawton shook his head. "I haven't the remotest idea," he replied.

"I went straight to a telephone and called up the police. I told them I had left my car in front of the library and when I went to get it, it was gone, and I knew it had been stolen. I gave them the number and a full description. Then I went home. In less than an hour they called me up and said the car had been found and was safe and sound, and the thief had left it down-town and the traffic officer—Delaney, I suppose—had carded the windshield. They were terribly sorry I had been inconvenienced, they said, and could I go at once and claim it. I could and did!"

Lawton grinned. "Darn smart and clever—but don't try it again, for I'm on—and I'd hate to have to arrest you."

Ruth's eyes fell sedately, but her lips still curved upward and her cheeks dimpled.

"Now, Mr. Lawton, to show you that I'm really not always in trouble, do come to-night to my house. I'm having a dance, and I'll not be happy unless you're there. Will you?"

"In uniform?" he laughed.

"Surely—brass buttons and all. I've always wanted to dance with a policeman," she confessed.

"I'll be there—sure thing," he promised, bowing her out of the door.

Triumphant and elated, she drove home.

"What a lark!" she thought.

He was by far the best-looking man of her acquaintance, and at dinner she regaled her family and guests with the tale. The story lost nothing in its telling. Every detail was vividly presented to the shouting and appreciative audience.

"Watch out for your policeman friend," her partner warned later on as he guided her to the strains of the most popular fox-trot. "We'll all be pinched if you don't handle him right."

"My word! There he is!" Ruth gasped, half unbelieving as the tall, blue-coated officer appeared in the doorway.

"Didn't think I'd do it, did you?" Lawton giped as Ruth, in a cloud of filmy blue tulle, met him with outstretched hand.

"I was a bit staggered," she admitted as he swung her on to the floor, "but only delightedly so."

"Wholesome respect for the uniform, of course," Lawton teased.

Ruth giggled. "I never knew what fun a policeman could be. I've always felt a bit shy of them."

Lawton hooted in derision. "Well, you managed a telling camouflage, then! No one would ever suspect."

Tall and straight, easy of manner, and a wonderful dancer, Lawton was exploited by Ruth as her latest find. His tight-fitting blue suit, brassy of buttons, stood out among the conventional black clothes of the men and the frilly, fluffy nothings that made up their partners' lack of costume.

"You must tell me all about the races,"

he reminded her at the end of the evening.

"I wish you could be there. We'd cheer ourselves hoarse on the winner."

"You don't wish it one-half as bad as I do!" Lawton exclaimed feelingly.

So Ruth Chester did not go to police court at nine the next morning. Instead, she was speeding south to her beloved blue-grass land.

Incidentally, between races and parties, she made it her business to find out all there was to know about the Lawtons—and especially Fred.

What she discovered only served to settle the pleased anticipatory smile on her red lips, and when she returned home she telephoned him at once, asking him to dinner.

He accepted with alacrity.

"He seems nice enough," Mrs. Chester agreed anxiously, "and of course, Ruth, if he is one of the Danville Lawtons, he must be all right. But it is so irregular," she added, perplexed.

"Oh, let him come," Bill, Ruth's younger brother, urged. "He looks so kind of spiffy in his uniform. We've had soldiers and sailors and marines here—but never a cop before this."

"Oh, Billy!" his mother cried, horrified.

"Well, bring him along," her father agreed. "He can't be any worse than some of the others."

So Lawton came—and came again.

He abruptly discovered that his duties took him up north on boulevard and riding-path astride his horse. And somewhere in his immediate vicinity Ruth Chester, blond and spirited and blue-eyed, cantered along, lithe and supple in her trim habit.

Her friends all laughed amusedly over Ruth Chester and her policeman as the weeks went by, and they began to look for her to tire of this new suitor and to throw him over. But he still remained firmly in the running.

"Summer was on the wane. One morning after a breathless race along a country road, Lawton pulled his horse down to a walk and turned to the glowing girl beside him.

"Ruth," he announced quietly, "this is my last day on the force."

"Why, Fred!" she exclaimed in surprise, with a quick glance into his face.

It was grave and determined, and yet there was a wistful something about his clear, keen eyes that made her turn her head away.

"Yes," he repeated. "You didn't for one minute suppose I'd be a policeman all my life, did you?"

"Oh, but you're such a dear in your blue and brass," she wailed.

"Then it's the lure of the uniform," he said wryly. "I had hoped—oh, yes—I had hoped and prayed, Ruth, that it might be me you liked—not this fool truck," and he looked bitterly off into the distance.

Then Ruth asked soberly: "What are you going to do, Fred?"

"I'm leaving here next week," he announced.

"Good Heavens!" she ejaculated weakly. "For where?"

"The Philippines," he answered, watching her face.

Then he reached over and took her hand while the horses walked slowly on down the lane.

"You see, Ruth, I gave up a captaincy in the army after I came back from France, and until I knew what I really wanted to do I took this job. It was only a make-shift—I got it through a pull—and I would have got off long before if you hadn't come on the scene. Thank God you did!" he breathed fervently, crushing her fingers tight in his.

Ruth looked straight ahead, while Lawton, with his eyes fixed on each seductive curve of her cheek, continued his plea in a soft whisper.

"Now I've just had it offered to me again—this captain's commission in the army—and I've accepted. I hate to go out alone—all the way to the Philippines. Won't you be game and go as my running mate?"

He slid his left arm around her shoulders and turned her head back against his chest while he looked with pleading, begging eyes into hers.

"Do you look as handsome in khaki as you do in blue? That's what I want to know," she asked, provokingly alluring.

"Oh, you teasing baby!" he cried in delirious joy. "Far more so!"

He lifted her from her saddle and seated her before him, while the horses, unnoticed, continued their grazing by the side of the grassy road.

Utterly oblivious of passing time, together they planned and built for the future the same rosy dreams and schemes of the ages.

Suddenly Ruth laughed.

"Either way I get a uniform."

Lawton smiled down into the face so close to his.

"I really believe you're so daffy over that outfit you'd marry a bell-boy!"

"I surely would if you had on his buttons!" she admitted, rubbing her cheek softly on the blue encircling arm.

HEARTSEASE

I CHANCED a little maid to meet
 (How like a lissom flower was she!)
 Who, with a modest mien and sweet,
 A bunch of heartsease gave to me.

Since looking in her pansy eyes,
 So witching was their subtle thrall,
 Like one who walks in grievous wise,
 No heart's ease have I had at all!

Sennett Stephens.

Eyes of the Dead

by George Gilbert

CHAPTER I.

LIKE THE JACKAL.

WITH steady nerve and practised hand Pierre La Forge drew back his right arm that quivered not and threw his last knife at the tense form that was outlined against the target board at the rear of the tiny stage of the Café Diable, center of the languid life of El Yaoub.

The flashing blade, whirring, end-over-end, quivered, point buried in the board where the perfectly molded arm of 'Leesah Freyall melted into the still more perfect curves of her shoulder and bust.

A moment she stood there, outlined in flashing, quivering blades, then, stepping down, shared the applause that was the tribute of the café's patrons to the two performers. Flashing a smile and a word or two of praise to the girl and holding out for her and snuggling about her the shimmering pink-and-black light satin overgown that she donned to satisfy the proprieties and to protect her slight, blue odalesque costume from wine stains and dust, did she elect to sit and chat a while in oasis-nurtured informality with some patron of the Café Diable, Pierre proceeded to gather up and put away his knives. He never permitted any one else to touch them, for they were the tools of his trade and he resented the slightest contact of the flesh of others on their copper, carven handles, holding, with the superstition ingrained in him, that if others used his knives he

would not be able to use them well thereafter.

The girl already had stepped off-stage when Pierre had completed his task and placed the gleaming blades in their teak-wood cases—thirty-six of them, dull, sinister-chased handles in rows, sheeny blades dangling into their several slotted rests. La Forge snapped the lid down, noted that 'Leesah already was sipping an iced sherbet in company with Captain Andre Troiville, with whom she was enjoying one of her periodical mild *affaires*, and strolled out, after leaving the box of knives with the droll, withered exempt who presided over the café's desk. Pierre liked the old soldier, and often wrote letters home for him; on his part Fourchette, the veteran, had a deep admiration for the knife-thrower.

Perfect accord existed between Pierre and 'Leesah. They had formed their alliance two years before in Cairo, where an injury to the then rising dancer's ankle had forced her to seek means of livelihood less active. The strained tendons healed awry and she was left with a limp—and no profession, save one that she read in the eyes of men. And then Pierre came, having heard of her plight, and offered her half his act, then untried, and she had accepted, becoming the living statue about which he placed his flashing blades. But one thing was required of her—steady nerve—and after Pierre had shown her how he could split a tiny bangle with the tip-point of one of his whirring blades at twenty paces, fifty times running, she had no more fear.

After that they had idled about Egypt, Morocco, Tunis, Algeria, its coast towns, in oases—wherever they could secure engagements. In Paris their act would have been a sensation, but out back of beyond it was an every-day bit of frivolity such as passes unnoted, almost, in obscure Near East or north African resorts, year by year. Pierre and 'Leesah, each a product of cross-breeding in lands of wonder, recked not of Paris or Berlin or Vienna. The very names were far, far away. The two were of the little folk of the world of amusement, chasing care from the dark brows of wrinkled traders, men of Mars, camel merchants, bazar folk, Jew gem merchants, rug buyers, sweetmeat sellers and the like in the Lands of Mixed Peoples under the brazen sun of Egypt and her dimmer neighborlands.

If 'Leesah wished to enjoy a mild period of amusement with some friendly male who was attracted by her brown-rose shoulders, languid eyes with half-lights of sombre meaning, white teeth like peeled almonds, hands of the softest when they touched one's cheek, why, Pierre only laughed, for he had the privilege of amusing himself, and found it not hard to make women see that his supple, hard-muscled, tense body, his oval, beautiful face, his slender, strong hands, and easeful attitudes as he stood about the bazars or sat idling in cafés, or strolled about in all sorts of queer quarters in his usual Bedouin costume, were interesting and attractive. The heritage of purposeful languor from his Arab mother, tempering the fiery impetuosity of his Gallic father, had given him poise, charm, courage, delightfully blended.

The desert moon's sickle, occulting with one mystic-rayed star, feebly lighted the dim, shadow-wrapped street onto which Pierre had stepped. A few strides took him from the café and its lights. A warning cry made him flatten against a wall as a late-coming string of camels sprawled by, bound for the caravansary. From latticed windows eyes flashed in vain, for Pierre was minded to stroll. To stroll, and, oddly enough, to think of—'Leesah! Pshaw!

Past walled-up fronts of houses, with their shielded delights, La Forge idled, the

last hulking camel serving as his guide. A new cry behind warned him in time to give way to a smaller line of desert burden-bearers. He saw them sway by the niche in the wall into which he had stepped—saw that they were led by a giant dromedary of the choicest racing breed, which was followed by his mate. Then he fell in behind the second lot and went slowly onward without purpose or plan.

The first string of camels entered the dim gate of the rest-place, but the second went straight past. Pierre, the Bedouin half of him yearning for the tang of real Arab tobacco, the reek of camel-dung fires, the taste of bitter-sweet, thick coffee, almost turned into the caravansary. But the lure of the giant dromedaries gripped him as he noted that their drivers kept on, as if to cross the town and camp in the sands at the edge of the oasis. He followed the urge that swirled him past the dim gate and into the track of the lurching beasts, that, spectral-wise, faded as he watched into the melting quiet distance.

Among the sand-billows the dromedaries were stopped. Afar La Forge saw them grouped for the night—saw the hair tents silhouetted against the glow that enrimmed the distant horizon. Then, and then only, did he venture forward, sending howling into the farther night a skulking jackal that had been, like him, a watcher of the making of the new camp. The voice of the grave-robbing animal made the blood of La Forge run icy for a heart's beat, and for once he knew fear. Never before had a jackal's plaint so affected him!

"I would have speech with your sheik," La Forge said to the wiry, erect Arab who accosted him at the edge of the ring of tents.

Already the reek of the smoke his nostrils craved for was on the mild air. The day had not been one of the greatest warmth; the sun's slumber had brought out a faint, potent coolness. The sand was pleasantly warm underfoot. The dromedaries made their stomachs to rumble and moaned in comfortable dissonances.

"Be off!" the man called. "We want no guests."

Pierre glanced keenly at the fellow and

saw that his pale, lean face had taken on an oddly cold pallor under the moon's faint sheen. Yet the black beard of him rippled onto his white tunic, and the motion of his threatening arm was vigorous.

"Peace; let the stranger come forward," a mellow, even voice called from the nearest tent, one larger than the others.

The voice had in it, with its mellowness, a hollow, echoing overtone that made Pierre start, for it was akin to the distant sound of the jackal in the silvered wastes without the camp.

He went forward, and before that larger tent saw a man sitting, his face toward the east, the scant moonbeams falling softly upon it. He motioned Pierre to a seat on the rug beside him, and La Forge, after a few words of greeting, sat down. Clapping his hands softly, the man ordered a black servant who appeared to serve the guest with sweetmeats, and soon, having eaten dates, honey-cakes, and drank thick, heavy coffee, La Forge sat smoking, at ease. The sheik placed a tiny pinch of some aromatic atop Pierre's pipe's glowing dottle, and he found it soothing; talk between the two men was aslant, on subjects distant from the immediate hour. Pierre found the Sheik Ben Yousef ready to listen to his phrases, explaining his mixed blood, the urge that came upon him at times to meet and touch hands with the desert-born. He wagged his great white beard as Pierre told of his talent and profession. Ben Yousef did not eat with Pierre. His face, wan, ivorylike, and his great sunken eyes, held the knife-thrower's regard. The lean, eager fingers, picking at the folds of his gray-dun robe, seemed never still. Except that he sat erect, his age, his long silences, his wan face, the picking of the fingers at his robe, suggested the actions of one touched with the spirit of the Great Change.

"And this woman of yours, who stands up and lets you cast your great knives at her! Is she, then, so brave?" the old Arab asked.

"As I have said, O father of many faithful!"

"Allah, what a woman!"

His eager, bleached hands stroked his huge, flowing white beard.

All about them was a ring of silence. No one from the camp had approached since La Forge had been bidden to the seat of honor.

The old man fell to musing, and La Forge watched him, head cupped on hand, elbow on the sand at the rug's edge. The dromedaries grumbled; afar the jackal howled his dislike of life and his homage to death that gave him food.

"He does well to howl," the grim sheik said, as if to himself.

Again the grave-robbler gave tongue in the wastes.

"It is a strange way to live; to appear before crowds, to cast death-blades, to be joined to a woman, yet not her master," the old man said suddenly. "What would you say, son, were I to show you a stranger way still?"

"Say on," Pierre answered, his body atingle with the sense of a coming adventure. He inhaled deeply of the aromatic-scented tobacco, that the sheik had renewed. He found it soothing, yet it aroused vagrant thoughts.

"I live by death, like the jackal."

He stroked his great beard softly and low he laughed, and again Pierre sensed in his laughter that which he had sensed in the mellowness of his voice when he first had heard his voice—kinship with the voice of the skulking animal.

"Come," Ben Yousef said suddenly, springing up with vigor surprising; "you have come to me trustfully, have eaten with me. Come!"

He strode off between the tents, toward the greatest of the sand hills. Pierre found it hard to keep pace with the old man. None of the camp-followers attempted to follow them; all continued to chat about their reeking fires. Within several of the tents faint lights gleamed and soft laughter seemed to float out onto the cool air.

The old man sat bending over, drabbling his lean, ghastly hands into the sand's tiniest waves at the foot of the great hill, before Pierre could catch him up. The little camp was distant a few hundred paces. As Pierre stepped to his side the sheik grunted with muscular stress and then in the tawny floor of the desert yawned a

hole as the old man swung back a door that had covered a stairway of stone leading under the huge sand mound.

"I have traveled far, far, to come to this place again," the old man said, straightening up and stroking his sweeping beard, while his sunken eyes seemed to phosphoresce under their terrible brows; "let us go down; you first, I after."

He waved his hand. Pierre stepped to the head of the stairway, impelled thereto by a feeling of irresistible yearning. The air was not dank; it seemed warm, inviting. The stairs were few and not steep, yet brought him to a passageway that seemed deep and ample. Urged by Ben Yousef, La Forge went forward and felt his way along a hollow-sounding corridor. Suddenly he came to a door, nail-studded, and paused.

"Let me find the torch and make a light," the old man said, his voice resonant yet queerly distant, in the gloom.

His finger-nails scratched against the rock; then came the touch of steel on hard stone. A spark glowed on tinder, then came the flare from the torch. The flame of it swept back over the big, stooping shoulder of him; his eyes gleamed dully. Pierre saw a hand-grip on the door, and, urged by his mentor, twisted the grip and sent the door swinging wide. They stepped over the threshold together. The torch, slaying the writhing shadows, showed merely a small cavelike room and at its far end the figure of a man seated on a stone, his back against the wall. The figure was dressed in burnoose and robes of white. The hands, resting in the lap, were withered. The eyes were sunken, spectral proofs that once they had looked abroad and informed their owner of things afar and anear.

"Behold the body of the holy Marabout of El Yaoub," the old man said grimly.

For the second time that night, and in his life, fear knocked at La Forge's heart. But he put the feeling from him with the valiance of pulsing manhood.

"No real man fears to look upon death."

The old sheik's hollow chuckle behind him was like the rasping of bleaching bones.

"No man fears to look upon the dead, mayhap, but to look upon death! See the eyes of the dead!"

Pierre glanced more and more sharply at the eyes, and, as the torch wavered and flickered, they seemed to dance in their sockets, dried and sunken as they were, and a peculiar glaze seemed to film them over, the pupils especially becoming clouded; then they appeared wrinkled, evil.

"This Marabout," Ben Yousef said softly, his words falling like echoes of distant omens, "lived long, long ago. He sought for a *new* way, and, we believe, found it. He was a follower of Mohammed, but added a *new* belief—that of the power of the dead over the living. It would weary you if I were to go into details, but we come here, my tribe, who are all his followers, once in ten years, to visit his tomb and to have danced before him the dance that he taught us—for he was a dervish. The dance will be soon. It will be danced by a woman of the tribe: one set apart for the service of death."

"This is a strange belief, so different from any sect that I have heard of," as the torch flared and the dead eyes shimmered.

"Yes, strange, odd, but we believe! Will you stay for the dance? It will be given on the sands above."

"I will stay."

"It is well. Let us go above now."

They stepped outside; their feet shuffled along the dust-strewn corridor. Then they mounted the stairs, and the old man, insisting that he should be left to do it, let down the great door again, covering the trap. In silence they paced toward the tents. Afar the jackal howled.

"The dance will be at moon-set," Ben Yousef said as they were seated upon the mat again. "My people all will be ready then; let us talk."

"Of what shall we talk?" when they were comfortable on the mat again. "Talk to me of what you meant when you said that you, like the jackal, lived by death."

"Said I so?"

"In very deed."

His white beard rippled as he laughed into it. The faintest echo of the jackal's

unearthly voice came to Pierre, oddly clear, across the sand billows. The old man leaned toward him, and Pierre could see how hollow, how vaguely mystifying, were his eyes as he replied:

"Then mayhap it was in jest. I am old—and ramble at times."

He leaned back—clapped his hands thrice. A turbaned servitor appeared out of the shadow of the nearest hair tent and scudded away at a word.

"I have sent him," the old sheik informed Pierre, "for Merim, our dancer. She is my—my daughter."

"But—"

"It is my wish that you see her. She will come veiled. We of this sect are at variance in customs with the other desert-born, in some things, but our women go veiled before strangers."

"A strange sect, truly."

The old man's slow chuckle was his only answer.

"There, Merim is coming."

He waved his hand down the line of tents. Pierre saw a slender figure approaching. The two men were standing to receive her when she came to the edge of the rug.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE SAND.

"THIS," Pierre heard the sheik say to the woman, who stood, veil strictly let down, "is a friend whom fortune has sent to us. He will remain for the dance."

Pierre thought that a shudder swept her form. But the tremor passed, leaving her firmly erect again.

"Sit with us, Merim, and help me to make pleasant the stay of our new friend."

He waved his hand, and she sank easily to the rug, seating herself with the indolent grace of the woman of the Orient. The westerling moon by now looked down at an angle that told of her setting soon. The old sheik and Pierre sat on the rug, Pierre opposite the woman. The moon-shine was on his face; hers was in shadow. The old man clapped his hands again, and the si-

lent attendant came, this time with a tray on which were sweets and three cups, of common ware, dull-brownish, sun-baked.

"Some pomegranate sherbet," the sheik urged upon Pierre. He took one of the cups, Merim another. Pierre took the third. The servitor disappeared.

Somewhere off down the line of tents a drum began softly to throb with dull resonance. A reed pipe sent its keen skirl through the muffled beat of the drum. At the sounds the woman stirred, and a little of her drink spilled on the white cloth of her ample robe, and it left a stain, as of blood, that, seen against the ghostly white of the robe even under that waning moon, showed crimson.

She paid no heed to this, but continued to gaze, Pierre could feel, through veil and dim light, out through her eye-holes worked in the veil, at him.

"The players are at practise for the dance," the sheik explained. "As for my Merim, she has no need to practise; she is perfect in her part; but come, friend, drink your sherbet."

La Forge lifted his cup, looking into its depths as it passed his chin, on the way to his lips. It seemed as though filled with some carnal liquid that had an aroma that allured yet repelled.

"Stay! Take you the cup from Merim; let her drink of yours," Ben Yusef called. "See, she has barely touched hers with her lips."

Pierre paused, his lips at the edge of the cup. He took the cup, and was dimly aware that she had reached her cup over to him. He took it, gave her his. He felt on the rim for the place she had wet with her lips—found it. He thought he heard the old man's hollow chuckle as he drank. He saw the woman drink, as well. The old man placed his cup on the mat's edge, untasted. The attendant came and removed the cups silently. The drum throbbed softly; the reed-pipe skirled weirdly. A tiny breeze stirred the tent-flaps; a night-bird called out in the more distant wastes; a bat flew past, squeaking evilly.

In Pierre's throat was a touch of fire—the tang of the red liquid from the cup her lips had touched. Desire began to stir

in him—the desire to see behind her veil, to be anear her. The drum throbbed, the pipe's thin-edged note keened through the rich roll of the sounding, tight-stretched skin.

The old man got lightly up and gazed down at the two seated on the mat, stroking his white beard slowly.

"Entertain you the guest, Merim," he said softly, "the while I go to make sure all is ready for the ceremony."

She spoke then, for the first time since coming:

"But, my father—"

Her voice was low, full, rich in liquid undertones, alluring minors that were not lost on La Forge's desire-chained ears.

"Thy father orders it; put up the veil; entertain the stranger."

She bowed in submission and flung up the veil. The old man softly stepped away into the sand, toward the farther tents. His chuckle trailed back as he went. Afar the night-bird called; the dun batted flitted anear.

Pierre watched until the woman raised her head, seeking in the dim moonlight for a clearer view of her face. His own, he felt, was well illuminated to the eyes of one of the desert-born by the rays of the lowering sickle.

The warmth of the red drink was working through and through La Forge's being, and he felt bold—overbold.

"Tell me of yourself," he pleaded, bending farther toward her. She did not draw back. "Tell me of your life. Have you been here often to dance before the dead Marabout?"

"No, O stranger! Never before. From earliest maidenhood I was set apart; taught the dance by the elder women of our small tribe. But one girl of the tribe is so set apart at a time—she whom the old man elects."

"Is he, then, not your father?"

"Yes, the father of us all."

She fell on silence then, musing, her chin cupped in one slender hand. Pierre saw, with many glances, that in that light her face had the appearance of rounded health, was satisfying. The eyes, burning, deep, under heavily marked brows, held him for

many seconds. As he gazed so, unrebuked, the drum pulsed; the pipes wailed, and the desire in him mounted as the taste of the red liquor warmed his throat's depths.

"Tell me," he said suddenly, "where you get the pomegranates from which you make your sherbet? The flavor of them is most sweet."

She laughed, deep-throated, easily, and Pierre shuddered, as for a fleeting second her laughter seemed like that of the old man. But the thought passed as she said:

"We brought them from our own oasis—far to the south."

"And it is called?"

"Ask my father."

She became silent again, toying with the folds of her robe. As La Forge watched her he felt more and more drawn to her.

"See," she said, "the slave forgot to remove the cup he brought for my father. If you wish it, drink his sherbet as well. Or shall I send for another cup?"

She leaned forward quickly and picked up the forgotten cup from the mat's edge. He received it from her hand, his own trembling. He placed the cup to his lips—drained it at a draft. He heard the jackal howl distantly.

The desire in him mounted anew as the red liquid went down. He fought himself to keep from doing or saying something he should not. He cast the drained cup from him with a reckless laugh.

"Doubtless your father has betrothed you to some strong, handsome young sheik?" he felt himself saying, against all customs.

"No; I am not to be wed. I am the tribe's dancer."

"Ah!" and his breath drew in sharply.

"But tell me of yourself," she pleaded, bending over toward him.

He began to talk, of his life, his calling, his partnership with 'Leesah, their successes, wanderings.

"And this woman—is she beautiful, loving?"

"Beautiful enough," he laughed; "but loving? No! We are but earning our living by being together thus."

"It would be strange if a woman could be with you and not have thought of—"

So far she spoke, then:

"Thank you, Merim," came the resonant voice of the old sheik, "for remaining with the stranger while I was away."

He had paced up to them so softly that Pierre had not heard him. He sat down and felt along the edge of the mat. A bat swirled low, chattering.

"The stranger was athirst; I gave your sherbet to him," she said.

"It is well; I can have another made if I desire," he said, crossing his hands and letting them rest in his lap. "You may go now, Merim, and be ready. I shall stay with the young man now."

She let her veil down and sprang up lightly and was gone down the line of tents quickly. The drum's throbbing went up in intensity; the pipe's wail came clearer, more and more alluring.

The old man waited, as if for a signal. Pierre, musing upon the girl's strange behavior, was silent as well. The liquor's tang warned him.

Suddenly the drum ceased; the pipe was still. From the tents shadowy figures emerged; a line of human beings formed.

"Come!"

The old sheik sprang erect and reached down for La Forge's hand. Pierre gave him his hand and felt the persistent tug that drew him erect. The hand that he gripped was bony, cold, but of surprising vigor.

"The old man assists the young to his feet," the sheik chuckled. "It should not be so; you should have assisted me, but I am able to renew my strength in ways that you would not understand."

Again Pierre felt the flame of fear flick over him, but it passed in a breath and he found himself at the end of the line of waiting folk, the old man at his side. Ahead of them, unaccompanied, went the girl.

The old sheik called an urgent order. The drum throbbed; the pipe skirled. The rhythm of the wild strain was communicated to the feet of the waiting ones, and the line moved off between the line of tents, toward the great sand hill. The reek of the red liquid he had swallowed surged up into the back of Pierre's throat again and again as the line went on and on. The drum

and pipe heightened their minor dissonances; the feet took on quicker and quicker movements. The far moon was bending toward the glowing horizon.

Pierre felt himself impelled to grasp the slender figure of the woman before him; his body fairly pulsed with some mad desire. The drum suddenly stopped—the pipe, too, stilled. The marchers opened up, and, guided by the hand of the sheik on his elbow, Pierre, following the girl, went through the ordered press and found that they were then in the foreground of a half-moon of people who, at a signal, seated themselves. The drummer, the man with the reed pipe, took station before the center of the crescent. The sheik sank to the ground, as did Pierre. The girl remained standing erect. She was on the stone doorway to the crypt beneath the sands!

She clapped her hands, raised them over her head. The drum took up its throbbing; the reed pipe cut into its booming. The girl, in time to the beats, began to dance, at first timidly, hesitatingly, then, abandoning herself to the wilding urge of the music, more and more terribly in earnest. Body, limbs, head, all in play, she began to show forth the greatness of her desert-born art.

La Forge watched, wonder dawning upon and then possessing him as Merim, in graphic gestures, showed forth the meaning of her dance—the homage of life to death. Her obeisance to the stone portal to the tomb, her wild, yearning appeals with open arms to the earth and sky, her advances, her retreats, wove themselves together into a perfect figure of renunciation. Then, as drum and pipe went into higher and higher frenzy, she began to disregard the stone portal and to dance more and more toward Pierre, chanting, low, sweet, alluring:

"The eyes of the dead are on us twain;
Come, let us dance—and dance again!"

He felt an overmastering desire to join her, to link his energy with her own, to be part of her wooing of the unseen.

Merim stood, at the close of one of her swaying figures, before him. He half arose. The people were still. Only the drummer and piper stirred as they played.

"And dance again!" he heard her barely breathe.

He bounded erect. The old sheik chuckled. The heady tang of the drinks came into Pierre's throat again. The urge of the desire in him was terrible in its force.

Merim leaned forward again, her arms were outstretched.

Pierre bounded forward wildly. His robes fluttered behind him. He had lost all restraint, recked not of old sheik, customs, dangers, the half-ring of the desert-born behind him.

She clasped him as his breast touched her own that throbbed under its white robe. She flung back her veil, and the moon showed him her face, more beautiful than he had dared to dream! He felt her swirl him into the rhythm of the dance, heard the savage yell of approval from the crescent of humanity; heard, too, the old sheik's dry chuckle.

Then all was merged into one ecstasy of thrumming pleasure, of seething, passionate joy of the dance. What the figure was Pierre did not know—or care. He felt that she had swept him out of himself and that they two were whirling, swaying, clasped together as the mystic languor of the barbaric music came to them, and that she was whispering to him words that set his veins on fire. He sought to read the depths of her eyes, but found them so deep-sunk under her great black brows that it was impossible. The moon-sheen, as they whirled, only showed him that they were dully alight!

The shouts of the people reached a frenzy; the music urged them ever faster and faster; the old sheik's shouts called for more and more speed of rhythm. Merim's hot breath, that had a touch of chill in it, fanned La Forge's warm cheek. The figure she was making with him closed in, came to a finale in a furore of energy, and then they were erect for a single tense instant, her arms clasping him strongly, and he felt underfoot the stone of the tomb's grim portal.

Then Pierre sensed that the human crescent had doubled in upon them and that they were surrounded by a yelling, gesticu-

lating crowd. The girl, frantic with the excess of excitement, drew Pierre down, down.

The ring about them was broken by the old sheik. With intent purpose he reached them, and the girl, her lips at Pierre's ears, murmured:

"Do not be alarmed; lie down with me."

She drew him down, down, and as the old man stood over them they were prone. At once the people, at a signal, began to heap sand over them. Merim drew her veil over Pierre's face and her own, and it kept the sand from their mouths, nostrils, and ears.

She told him to use his elbow to make of the veil a support that kept the sand from his face. She protected her own.

The flavor of the red drink was in Pierre's throat; the urge of the strange adventure strong upon him.

Their bodies were weighted by now with the sand. The talk of the people ceased or was blotted out by the sand's deadening screen between ear and outer air. Pierre could feel the girl's warm body beside his in their bed of sun-kissed sand. She was murmuring something to him that chained his ears as the tang of the red drinks chained his will. It was something about the "eyes of the dead," about youth, strength, the desert wind, the tinkle of water over rocks—

And then he felt her warm kisses on his lips, and heard her saying the most unbelievable phrases—that linked death to life.

And then he seemed to forget that he was Pierre La Forge and to drift out and far on a ripple torrent of happiness, perfectly shared.

CHAPTER III.

THE KISS OF VISION.

IN the half-light of false dawn Pierre stirred under the sand heap. He felt that Merim was beside him. An irritation, a repulsion, whelmed him. He wriggled from under the sand and found that he could extricate himself easily. He drew apart from the sand heap and watched her

awaken. She opened her eyes, then shut them so quickly that he was not able to see into their depths. He glanced about.

The tents were gone!

He stared at the place where the dromedaries had been, at the marks that showed where the tents had been. He stared at the prints of the feet in the sand that had not yet been effaced by the dawn-wind's sifting. Then he stared back at the girl, just emerging from under the sand heap. She had her veil down as she sprang upright. She came quickly toward him and took his face in her two hands. He felt their chill. She drew him up to her, and he kissed her through the veil. She had no warmth of lip to give him; she was cold.

"Your people?" he asked. "Where are they?"

She laughed, low, sweet, yet with a hollow resonance in her laughter. It sounded like forgotten music, minor, far-away.

"They will be here again soon," she said. "Perhaps they have gone into El Yaoub, and will send back some one for me."

"Then come with me. I shall find them for you—or stay with me."

There was a succession of dismal howls on the summit of the great sand hill. It was the jackal, hymning his desire to the coming sun. To the east the horizon was showing red. Near at hand the shadows of false dawn were somber; every hither slope of sand was umberously solemn.

"If you could open the door of the old tomb, I could wait in there. I should not fear," she said. "You must go now."

"But may I return?"

"Yes, to-night."

"You will be safe here, alone?"

"Yes; I am sure. Come, lift the door. I shall help."

Under a compulsion he could not resist he bent over, side by side with her. Their hands found the huge ring in the stone slab. Together they tugged at it, and it seemed to come up easily. At her suggestion he laid it back and she went to the top step, turning to face him.

"And do you much desire to see me again?" she whispered, her hands on his shoulders as his eyes tried to pierce the veil that shielded hers.

"Yes," and his voice had in it a deep appeal.

"Then shut your eyes, my lover."

He shut his eyes.

"I will place a kiss on each of them—a kiss that will give you vision to see me when I am gone—to see those who are *not*!"

He waited in expectant ecstasy. He felt her breath, then her lips, on each eyelid. He heard the jackal howl. The dawn-wind came, coolly sweet. He heard a rustle, sensed an absence of that which had been near and dear—opened his eyes—swayed—felt that he was fully erect, arms outstretched as if he had been grasping for something that had vanished.

It was full dawn. The sun was coming fast. Birds were winging overhead, singing cheerily. The palms of El Yaoub were waving in the breeze. The great sand hill loomed beside him. The sand was cool. It bore the impress of his body. There was no trace of tents, of people, of a stone door in the desert's floor. Cocks in the mud huts of the simple folk of the town's outskirts were crowing lustily!

He felt as one who had slept heavily. He began to walk about, then to run. Then he took firm hold on himself and steadied. He walked—toward the town. He felt deeply moved, yet dared not dwell upon the affair too much. But he determined to put it to the test. He stopped at the caravan-sary and questioned the gate-tender:

"Tell me, O keeper of the gate, did a small tribe, with great dark dromedaries, leave this morning?"

"Even so, O most just. They made their camp near the great sand hill for the night, and left early for the Waddy of Zin—"

"Early!"

"Yes; they passed before the dawn, and they went mourning."

"Mourning?"

"Yes; the old sheik, their leader, told me that his daughter, a maiden of great beauty, died in the night, and they were going to their home oasis to give her sepulture. The body was bound on the back of the great black dromedary that led their herd. I saw a stain, as of blood, on her robes."

Pierre clutched at the gate's post to keep from falling.

"You too are ill, most just," the old man cried out in alarm. "Your eyes are glazed like the dead's; your face is white! Let me assist you!"

"No; it will pass," and Pierre drew himself upright. "I must go now. Peace!"

"And with you, peace!"

Pierre went staggeringly, then gained more and more control over himself. By the time he reached the Café Diable it was time for breakfast, and he had recovered self-control in larger part. He had coffee, his own narghile to smoke. In time his agitation died down and he became strangely calm and almost peaceful.

He waited until Leesah came in for her meal. She entered, glanced about, smiled, came swiftly toward him with expression fleetingly wistful.

"Where were you?" she bantered, lighting a cigarette, to keep him company. "Off on some of your night-raids? Ah, you men, you men!"

She pouted prettily, and he saw how firm and rounded was her chin and how glorious the lines of her shoulders and neck. She bent over to puff a ring of smoke at him—something she often did in mock-play. He noted that she was glancing at him intently.

"Did you have a nice evening—with Troiville?" he asked calmly, giving her look for look.

"No; he only amuses me because—there is no one else."

"Oh," puffing deeply in his hubble-bubble.

"But if some one else does not amuse me soon, Troiville may," and she laughed shortly.

Again he saw the flash of evanescent wistfulness.

"Ah," puffing deeply again.

"Pierre!" she cried out suddenly. "What are you doing with yourself that your eyes are so—so dead? The pupils, oh, the pupils, they seem to me like—like those of dead fish. Ugh! You must take care, more sleep!"

She shuddered, turned her eyes away. He laughed hollowly, got up, dropped the am-

ber of his pipe carelessly, and went to his room that was in a near-by house. He glanced nervously at the mirror over his unused bed. He stared. She had spoken the truth. His two pupils were curiously shriveled and clouded and seemed to lack life. Yet he could see clearly—better than he ever had seen.

Resisting a strong tendency to run, to walk about, to seek for he knew not what, La Forge came from his room into the narrow, crooked street. He intended to go past the Café Diable, into the more squalid parts of the town—to wander about, to think as he went. But at the door of the café he was accosted by old Martin, the exempt, with:

"M. Pierre, would you be so kind, this morning—"

It was Martin's usual way of prefacing a request for La Forge to write a letter home for him. He welcomed this interruption, hoping the kindly chat he would have with Martin would steady him down. He smiled and turned in with the ancient chatterbox, whose tongue clattered on:

"See, your box, with the knives in it, is all dusted and cleaned. No one has opened it. I would not permit that, *enfin!* My letter to-day is for my son's wife. I have one from her. I know it is hers by the postmark, you see. You taught me how to tell that postmark. Here is the letter. Now read it for me, and here are sheets and envelopes and my own pen and ink. Together we shall write her a famous reply. Why, what is the matter?"

La Forge by this time had the letter open and was seated behind the desk with Martin. Knowing the extreme love of the old exempt for his wife's favorite, his only son's daughter, he had allowed a serious expression to come over his face as he had read the opening lines:

I am very ill, but hope to be better soon,
dear grandpapa.

But finding the old man had suspected bad news, and seeing that the way was thus paved for breaking it, Pierre gently read the missive, one of those humble, simple, tender ones such as common folk write each other in moments of deep trouble.

"But you see," Martin clutched at the final line, "she says distinctly that the doctor says the case will run its course in a few days, and she says '*au revoir*,' not 'farewell.' Blanche is a sensible girl, and would not hold out a false hope. Come, let us write her a cheerful letter that will reach her a month hence, when she is all recovered, and it will make her laugh. Let me tell you once again, M. Pierre, what a girl she is. Merry, with black eyes and rosy cheeks, hair in ringlets, quick in word and act, and in her starched Normandy head-dress and with hand-knit lace edging her apron—what a cure for sore eyes, *mon-sieur*!"

At the words "sore eyes" Pierre suddenly passed his hand over his eyes, for the words brought up the thought of what he had seen in the mirror in his own room but a few moments before. And his eyes were burning!

Old Martin leaned forward and exclaimed:

"Ah, your eyes! Are they sore? They are like mine were during the old campaigns in the desert, when the smoke of the fires got into them! But, no, it is not that. Decidedly, M. Pierre, you must see one of the native healers. We have no European doctor here, but those native hags are clever. I can tell you of one that—"

"No; it is nothing; it will pass. I did—did get smoke in my eyes last night. But to return to your famous letter. What shall I say to Blanche, your son's wife?"

"Ah, yes! The letter!"

He was attentive as a child now. He pursed his lips, made as if to compose some erudite sentence. Pierre suggested a phrase, which Martin adopted as his own, nodding consent. Pierre glanced at the old man from time to time. His eyes were burning a bit.

Of a sudden, over the old man's shoulder, he saw, as it were, a shadow, a dim outline of a pretty woman with Norman coif, lace-edged bodice. She seemed to have black hair; yes, hair in ringlets, rosy cheeks, and she was smiling. Old Martin had described Blanche to him so many times that he seemed to know who the woman was, and it did not seem strange that he could

see her there in the little desk-niche of the Café Diable, oasis of El Yaoub. His pen continued to scratch; he continued to suggest neat phrases to Martin, who smiled and made each his own thankfully. The final one was:

I know this will find you recovered from your slight illness and that your next letter will be more cheerful than the last.

Pierre glanced over Martin's shoulder again, and the impression that he could see a woman there deepened. She seemed to regard him mournfully, and placed one forefinger up as one who denies and shook her head slowly. He could see behind her the cracks on the wall, the web of the green-gold spider to whom Martin fed flies. He even noted that she had a tiny brown mole on the point of her rounded chin. His eyes swept down to the paper again. He signed the letter for Martin and gave Martin the pen to make his cross with. He glanced up again. His eyes had ceased to burn. The woman no longer was there!

Martin glanced up gratefully.

"Ah, M. Pierre," he said warmly, "how can I thank you? You are so kind. All I can do to repay you is to keep your knife-case in order and safe. *Dianterre*, that is not much. But it is all an old exempt can give."

"I am only too glad to help you, Martin. But, tell me, did not your Blanche have a mole on the point of her chin?"

"Of a surety, *monsieur*! I have told you of that, too? You are so kind to be so interested in us. But why do you ask?"

"Oh, papa, merely to refresh my memory."

Pierre glanced by the old man again, but saw nothing. He smiled warmly at Martin, addressed the letter with a fine flourish, sealed it, and gave it to the ex-soldier. He thought to escape from Martin's voluble thanks by going to a table in the rear of the café and ordering a cooling drink. He had a curious, penetrating thirst, that was growing on him, he then realized, and to the nimble Syrian who came for his order he gave the call for "a pomegranate sherbet."

He wanted such a sherbet, rich, red, cool, to touch the seat of the craving in his throat. He wanted to glance into the depths of the red, red liquid, to sip it—

The Syrian slid the sherbet cup across the little table to him. He was about to take it by its stem when he heard Martin saying:

"Here are your cigarettes, M. le Capitain. Yes, M. Pierre is in the rear room."

Pierre heard the crisp, precise step of Troiville; next he stood smiling down upon the knife-thrower.

"To what do I owe the honor, Troiville?" Pierre asked rather shortly. He wanted to be alone, to rearrange his disordered thoughts. Least of all did he wish to gaze upon the captain's ruddy, well-shaven face, listen to his heavy jests.

"Were you about the town last night?" said Troiville, seating himself at Pierre's rather forced invitation.

"Yes?" with rising inflection.

"I know you often visit odd corners here and hear much queer gossip. As head of the native police I have to know such things."

"Yes?" more sharply still.

"There is a report among the natives that an old sheik, from Zin, and his little tribe, was here last night on some religious errand. He belongs to some obscure sect and has a few followers here. Did you by chance see a small band of Arabs, with giant black dromedaries leading their herd?"

"Yes, near the great sand hill, beyond the caravansary.

"Thanks. I wanted to be sure. They went away before dawn, I am told. I am glad they have gone. Those strange sects are apt to stir up trouble."

Pierre waited, eyed Troiville keenly. His eyes were hurting again. He kept them on the table and sherbet, spinning the glass by its stem. The captain ordered a drink, and Pierre judged there was more to come. Troiville sipped his drink, smacked his full, red lips with pure animal enjoyment. Pierre stole a glance past him and, behind him, seemed to discern dimly a form like that of Merim, the eyes all but blazing through the slits in the down-hung veil. The ap-

pearance vanished as he strove to focus his eyes upon it, and the pain in his pupils eased up. Just before it faded he sensed that Merim's finger was on her lip in a gesture of warning for him to be silent as to her.

Pierre took up the pomegranate sherbet and drained it at a gulp. He hoped for a penetrating satisfaction from the drink—the result was a flat, sugary taste on his palate and tongue that was disappointing. The thirst for some peculiar, nerve-easing draft continued to be strong upon him. He ordered an absinthe.

"Absinthe! So early!" Troiville chaffed, after sipping the last of his sherbet. "*Sang Dieu!* What nerves you must have, to be able to sip absinthe so early and to have control left at night to hurl your knives within a fraction of an inch of the lovely form of Mlle. 'Leesah."

Pierre laughed softly, sipped his absinthe again. It did not cure his thirst entirely, but it was better than the sherbet, flatly sweet.

He lifted his eyes and studied the captain's face, and found the captain eying him as well. Troiville was a robust man, and his gay peace-time uniform, with its braiding, lightly worn fatigue-cap, suited him to a marvel. His neat little mustache of tawny hue he caressed from time to time as he talked.

Troiville smiled engagingly, then leaned both elbows on the table, made his five fingers of his right hand meet exactly the five of his left before his deeply cleft chin. When he had adjusted them to his satisfaction he said:

"M. La Forge, a few words with you, as a man of sense."

"Yes?" and Pierre, as well, leaned forward.

"In regard to— You will pardon me, I am sure, in any case?"

"Ah, be at ease!"

"Well, then, in regard to your pretty companion—"

"Mlle. Freyall?"

"Hein?"

"What then?"

"What then? But, *ma foi*, what ails your eyes this morning?"

"I was near an Arab fire last night."

"Ah, I see. The reek of their fires is hard on the eyes of we French. But I should think that you, half Bedouin, would not be so affected. But, that is aside. As to your pretty companion?"

"Well?" the voice sharp now. He rubbed his eyes. He had seen Merim's semblance behind the captain's chair again. His eyes burned deeply.

"We are talking as sensible men?"

"I hope so, *monsieur*. But I fail to see where this will lead to."

"In good time! You may have noticed that I have paid some attentions to her."

"That is her affair, *monsieur*."

"Ah! Then your relations are only formal?"

"Businesslike, *monsieur*. But why all this parley?"

"I am practically in exile here. I seek for what amusement can be found."

"What then?"

"Before now I have found player-women amusing, but—"

"You have not found Mlle. Freyall so?"

"No; *ma foi*, she is so—precise, cold, proper."

Pierre could feel his eyes burning anew. He leaned back, laughed nervously, rubbed his hand over them. When he took his hand away he saw again Merim at the back of Troiville's chair. She had her veil up and was smiling and pointing toward Troiville. Her glance was full of meaning, her smile scornful.

"Troiville," Pierre said sharply, "what you say about my companion should be said—"

He paused. Merim had vanished.

"Yes?" Troiville urged.

"Should be said to Mlle. Freyall. It is not for we two to sit here in a café and chatter about her. You are excited or nervous and have forgotten your customary poise. I overlook it. But, let us not discuss her again. She is a good girl—and you know it. Who better, after your pursuit of her?"

Troiville's face went white, then red. He started up with such force that his chair clattered over backward.

"And let me tell you more, *Troiville*,"

Pierre's voice went on, firm, even. His eyes did not smart by now. "You are in command in El Yaoub. Yes, in full command, with your company of the —th of the line and your native police. We two are but strolling mummers, and you often have amused yourself with such. But in this case you will not amuse yourself further. If Mlle. Freyall accepts your attentions, well and good. If she objects, and you persist, well—"

"Well, what?" and the captain leaned forward, his lips drawn back, showing his strong, white teeth.

"Well, I can split a basile at fifty paces with one of my knives. Draw your own conclusions, *monsieur*."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAJOR AND HIS AID.

HE glanced over Troiville's shoulder. He could see Merim plainly now.

His eyes burned. She was smiling approvingly. The strange thirst in his throat's depths gripped him, even then. Merim's appearance faded. His eyes ceased to burn.

Troiville had turned and was going out of the café. No one had been in; no one had observed their talk and its dramatic dénouement. Old Martin drowsed in his chair at the desk. The waiters were all lounging in the shadow of the wall in the court outside.

"Remember!" he called after Troiville.

The sullen captain turned and regarded him a moment steadily, then went out of doors.

The flies buzzed. Outside a camel, passing, grunted. Its driver chode the beast in choice Arabic of great force. La Forge spuri his empty cup, got up quickly, and went out. Troiville had gone. The street was empty. The sun had smitten all life in El Yaoub, apparently, and the community was dozing.

Pierre went to his own rooms and sprawled on a divan. His eyes burned. He got up and looked at them in the mirror. They were oddly clouded and even sunken as to their pupils. He rubbed

them, then laid down again. At once the pain in his eyes ceased. He became aware, after what seemed a long time, of a presence in the room. He shut his eyes and waited. Two fingers were laid, one on each of his eyes. The pain stopped. He feared to open his eyes, but the cooling pressure continued, and he turned his head, thus moving his eyes from under the finger-tips. He opened his eyes—saw 'Leesah standing beside the divan, smiling at him.

"You poor, poor tired lad," she said; "I have come with some lotion that I got of an old Arab woman who does my washing. I went to her at once after seeing your eyes this morning. The native women have so many healing simples that I thought it would do no harm. Come, it is late, time for us to rehearse. You have slept away the morning and it is the cool of the afternoon. Come, you lazy fellow."

She tweaked his ear with her cool fingers. He found himself smiling at her. She went and sat on the window ledge and gazed down at the folk passing. Rarely had she ventured, in their travels, into such close companionship as now.

La Forge got up and sat on the edge of the divan.

"I walked past the porter at the gate and came right in. I knew you would be merely resting," she said, with an evident effort to make small talk.

He felt refreshed. He got up, flexed his muscles, washed his face and eyes, applied some of the lotion from the little jar she had brought. He felt distinctly better, but that the thirst in the depths of his throat would not cease from troubling. She continued to sit on the ledge and to gaze, abstracted, at the passing folk.

"Tell me, 'Leesah," he said, speaking from some outer compulsion he could not resist, "what you think of Troiville?"

She flashed a quick glance at him, then turned her head away, gazing still downward and talking partly over one perfect shoulder that showed its roundedness under the prim-necked satin dress of mauve that she wore.

"Eh? Troiville? Why discuss him?"

His eyes began to burn. It seemed to him that he could see Merim, behind 'Lee-

sah, right alongside the wall, at the window's edge. She was smiling.

"He is not worth discussing, true enough. But he disgusts me. Are you much interested there?"

She threw back her head and laughed—joyously. He saw the phantom of Merim vanish, like a wisp of sun-slain mist.

"Interested? What fun? With him? So self-satisfied, so bourgeois!"

Then she stopped as she saw the look of relief on his face.

"Why, do you care if I—I amuse myself—"

"No; that is understood."

"Oh!"

She turned her back and glanced out of the window again. He felt his eyes burn anew. Merim was between him and 'Leesah again.

Swinging her little foot, 'Leesah tapped the wall under her window's ledge with her high heel. She hummed a little Arab love-song, plaintive, sweet:

"The sun slays the stars,
But the night makes them live—
Ah, love, loose the bars,
Your lips, give, oh, give!
The sun is our foe,
Sweet night is our friend;
To the wide sands we must go,
Where true love hath no end."

She turned her head again. He started toward her, then drew back. Merim had all but touched him on the eyes. They burned again. He drew up stiffly. 'Leesah turned to him again, saying:

"For one thing, Troiville is utterly impossible, my friend. The natives here hate him."

"They are apt to hate their conquerors."

"But this is different. The old woman from whom I got the eye lotion told me why. I have tried to be kind to her. She saw me go out for a donkey-ride with him the other day. She came to my room next day with my laundry. She warned me not to be seen with him, that he was bad, and would meet some terrible mishap."

"She gave some reason for her belief?"

"Yes, this—"

She paused. Pierre saw the form of

Merim dissolve and vanish. The last glimpse he had of her then was of her face, smiling in contentment.

"Yes, this," 'Leesah went on. "It seems there is a queer sect in some distant waddy, that of Zin, I think, my friend. A small tribe. They were in here two years ago on some pilgrimage connected with their sect's belief. Troiville, on the pretext of political troubles, but really to have an excuse to see the reputed beauty of the tribe, a young girl named Merim, raided the camp of the strange sect. He forced his way into the tent of the old sheik, Ben Yousef of Zin, tore down the hangings sheltering the women of the sheik from public gaze, and tore off the veil of the girl Merim, and carried her off. He kept her several days and then put her forth from out the town. It made a scandal that he had hard work in covering up, and that even now is under investigation, and since then the natives, aside from the ones attached to him from mercenary motives, have been sullen to Troiville."

A sudden, gripping hate for Troiville sprang up in Pierre's heart. Its coming took away, like magic, the thirst that had been racking him. His eyes ceased to burn. A purpose took possession of him. His form seemed to dilate. Then said 'Leesah:

"Why, my friend, what is it? You seem better, brighter. Your eyes seem well again. That lotion was good, was it not?"

She got off the window ledge quickly and came to him. She placed her fingers on his eyelids that he held motionless for her to feel. Her touch was as a benediction—tender, deft, allaying his misery.

"I can feel they are less fevered," she said encouragingly.

She stepped back. He barely restrained an impulse to reach out his arms to her. The purpose within him deepened, surged, became masterful. Yet he was not flurried, but calm, serene. He knew what he *wanted* now! Let Troiville—

"After hearing that tale," 'Leesah was saying, "of course I kept away from Troiville, unless in public. We will be going soon, my friend, and we want no trouble with him. We will forget him at the next place we go to."

He laughed with new resonance and assurance.

"Come," he said, "let us go to the café for our little rehearsal. Yes, we can afford to ignore him unless he becomes offensive."

He ushered her out, and they went together down the little stair to the street. The town was waking up again. They crossed to the café and passed old Martin, who nodded and gave them a warm salutation. He handed Pierre the box of knives. La Forge took them, and the two went back to where the target board was. La Forge began his preliminary practise—cutting the pips from playing cards, clipping the ash off a cigarette held in 'Leesah's fingers, splitting bangles. He was cool, calm, alert. He did not miss a single of his most difficult throws. Finally he signaled for 'Leesah to take her station before the target-board.

She stood before him, arms outspread, as if crucified. His thirty-six knives piled into the crook of his left arm, the handles all toward his body, Pierre picked them up, one after the other, and launched them, whirling, shining, at her. Each found its appointed place, some alongside her waist, some against her neck, some alongside her outstretched arms. Soon he had her outlined in gleaming steel. His eyes were keen at first, and only near the close of the trial did he feel them burn. He passed his hand over them. He saw 'Leesah smiling at him encouragingly; he smiled back, yet the smile froze on his lips.

At 'Leesah's side he saw Merim. Her face was serious. Her right hand was outstretched, the index finger pointing. He had one knife left. Her finger came to rest in the vacant spot in the steel fence about the body of 'Leesah—the vacant spot right where perfect arm came to perfect bust. She smiled meaningly, and under an urge that he could not control Pierre launched the final knife. It whirled, end-over-end, the point thudded home! It had snugged so close to the girl's body that the force of it made muscles jar. But she, smiling, alert, was not touched!

Pierre rubbed his eyes again. They had ceased to burn. Merim was gone. 'Lee-

sah stepped from the knives' hedge and praised him.

"Well done, my friend, well done. That last throw! How perfect! Your eyes must be all well by now. A little lower and inward and it would have found my heart, *mon chère*. But I fear not; you never miss."

She came forward, bent to inspect his eyes. He closed their lids. She touched them with her finger tips. He thought her lips touched them.

There was a little commotion near the door. A soldier came in, flicked an envelope at old Martin, who cried out in anguish. Pierre opened his eyes and turned to the exempt, who was holding out to him the envelope, one with a mourning border. 'Leesah ran to him and took it. Pierre caressed. She broke the seal for Martin and read:

"DEAR GRANDPAPA:

This will inform you of sad news. Blanche, whose last letter told you she was so very, very ill, has since died. I am sending this by special post, learning a transport with mail leaves Marseilles to-morrow, so you should get it, perhaps with her letter."

There were further homely phrases. Old Martin heard them with head bowed. As she read the missive Pierre remembered seeing the girl in the Normandy coil behind the old man when he had been writing the letter for him earlier in the day. There was no appearance of the sort now though. And he remembered the words of Merim, as she had kissed his eyes upon their awakening:

"A kiss that will give you vision to see me when I am gone—to see those who are not!"

He could not control the tremor of fear that swept him.

'Leesah noted this tremor—the whitening of features—and asked him anxiously if he were not ill. He answered her hastily and strode to the street door. She came after him and was about to question him further, when there came a warning cry of camel folk. They glanced up the narrow, twisty way to see a group of racing dromedaries coming. They were made to kneel before the café, and their riders—bronzed,

alert Frenchmen—alighted and strode away toward the barracks that were reached by use of a side-passage off the main thoroughfare of El Yaoub.

"It is Major Cherimande, here to take command," a gossiping sous officer informed Pierre. "The major and his aides."

"But Troiville—"

"Must go to Algiers to answer charges of undue oppression upon the natives—something about that affair of the old Sheik Ben Yousef's daughter, *hein!* He could not hush it up; that great lady, La Belle France, may seem to nod sometimes, but she hears all her children, white or black, in good time."

By now Pierre felt normal again. 'Leesah, sensing this, went, at his suggestion, for a bit of a stroll about the near-by quarters. A new feeling of nearness, of shy regard for her, filled him as he gave her his arm past muddy places. Her slight limp, from her awry foot, seemed to him as a plea for his attentions to her. A strange peace took possession of him—a peace blended with certainty of resolve. Merim, and the old sheik, seemed to fade from his mind, together with the fantasy of the previous night. Now and then he had recurrences of the strange thirst; his eyes were easeful, his nerves steady, his flesh warm.

CHAPTER V.

"THE EYES OF THE DEAD."

WHEN Pierre and 'Leesah came in together for their performance, it was to find the café full, lights turned high. The coming of the commission from Algiers, the buzz of gossip, had drawn all El Yaoub to the café. Major Cherimande and party were sipping iced drinks near the front of the café. Bazar sellers, sous officers, date buyers, rug dealers, chattered in a dozen tongues farther back. At a table apart, silent, scowling, was Troiville, his hat slouched over his brows. He did not give them a glance as Pierre piloted 'Leesah past him, to the little alcove behind the target board, where they made ready for their act. Pierre need-

ed to do little; 'Leesah had but to doff her over-robe, and then she was ready to appear in her stage costume—that of an odalquesque—pink and blue satin, with tiny slippers with their toes upcurled, Tartar fashion.

The talk outside buzzed, mounted. Peeping out from time to time, Pierre and 'Leesah could note how folk kept apart from Troiville and how he tried to carry off his impending disgrace with an air.

'Leesah lolled in the alcove on some cushions there. Pierre stood at the alcove's entrance. He was perfectly calm, content, sure of his purpose. He had resolved, in some way, to come at Troiville. His eyes began to burn again. He tried to brush the sensation from them with a quick pressure of his finger-tips. He glanced at Troiville.

Behind his chair was Merim, gazing at him, veil upraised. On her face was a glance of extreme aversion and menace. She pointed at the captain.

The vision passed like dawn-slain mist. Pierre felt his eyes become cool again, and his set purpose was clearer, stronger.

The olive-skinned Greeks who played for their act forsook their places as waiters and came, thrumming their instruments, attentive to their wonted cue. The folk in the café stirred. Old Martin, alert, made ready to lead the applause for his favorites, even though his face was sad over his own near grief. Pierre sent the old exempt a glance of cheer across the little pool of faces upturned under the lamps' brightness. 'Leesah stepped out beside him and sat at the side of the target board. Her time was not yet, save for placing things at which Pierre threw his gleaming blades. A ripple of plaudits rewarded their *entrée*.

Pierre went back to his place that was near the outer fringe of the café's patrons. He found himself close to the chair of Troiville, which was by now much apart from all the others, as the drawing away of all had left the accused man to himself. Disregarding this, for the moment, La Forge set himself to the task at hand.

He began methodically to cut the pips out of the playing cards as 'Leesah placed them for him. He heard behind him the

low, sibilant gibes of Troiville, unheard by all the others.

"Hah, your nerves are bad; you will miss."

Or again: "That was a poor throw, La Forge—poor for you."

Instead of unnerving Pierre, these mean slurs but steadied him as his hatred for the man deepened.

Applause came from the others, Major Cherimande leading it. Pierre turned and bowed, looking over Troiville's head calmly. 'Leesah, bowing, had a serene face. She was too far away to have heard Troiville's taunts.

Now came the other tricks—harder. Pierre poised his knife for the throw that was to snuff the cigarette held between the girl's red lips. Never had she seemed more beautiful to him than then, as she turned her loyal eyes to him and held her splendid body taut and stiff, that no fault of hers might mar the act.

As he drew back his right hand for the cast he heard Troiville sneer:

"Your hand is trembling, La Forge!"

But the knife sped true, thudded into the target board, after nipping the ash from the cigarette.

Pierre turned to acknowledge the applause. He permitted one glance, white-hot, to flick onto the gray, drawn face of the captain. The face of him went red at the flare of that hate-blent look. Then Pierre turned toward 'Leesah again. She was going toward the target board to take her place for the supreme act—the outlining of her body in the hedge of gleaming blades.

Pierre turned once to note what Troiville was doing. He was spinning his glass, his lips framed for another taunt. It came with the cast of the first blade that, none the less, found its correct mark just over the girl's head:

"Bah, you will kill her, with your donkey play, La Forge."

His voice was low, concentrated. It came to Pierre's ears alone.

At the cast for the point of 'Leesah's right shoulder Troiville's searing tongue flicked:

"Not that way, careless one; you will

kill her when you cast for her left armpit, near the heart."

But the knife, whirring, flaming, found its proper billet. Applause swept the room. The girl was erect, like a statue. Her smile encouraged Pierre, and he found in it a new, unsuspected loveliness.

He drew back his hand. He heard a dim taunt from Troiville. He was determined to disregard him—then. As his arm tightened for the cast a dart of pain swept into his eyeballs. He felt calm, sure, but—At 'Leesah's side was Merim! Her finger was pointing to the spot where the knife should strike. She was smiling. Her veil was up, over one shoulder. Her eyes seemed to phosphoresce from under her deep brows. Her forefinger was at the zone of 'Leesah's body, on the right side.

The knife sped—thudded true just where Merim's finger had been held. Pierre smiled to himself. He was steady, cool. A desire to make a terrific finish of the act swept him. The bundle of knives in the crook of his left arm seemed as the weight of feathers. The sinister handles of carved copper seemed warm to the touch. Merim floated between him and 'Leesah, pointing now here, now there—knives whirled, flamed. He could feel his arm working, pistonlike. He was at the summit of human power, yet felt a vast reserve of strength within him, untapped. He finished limning out 'Leesah's right side in sharpened steel in a burst of fiery abandon, each throw more perfect, daring, than the others. Wherever the fingers and eyes of the dead directed, he placed a huge knife. The carved handles, sinister, malign, were studded about 'Leesah's tense form, quivering and shaking as each new blade whizzed home and made the target board to jar and give.

A whirlwind of applause swept the crowd.

"Alons! Encore!"

'Leesah was smiling encouragingly at him. up to a frenzy, that you may slay 'Leesah was the appearance of the desert-born girl, yet he could see past her!

"Fool," came from Troiville, "you are beside yourself. You are working yourself up to a frenzy, that you may slay 'Leesah for loving me. If you misthrow, phaff!

it will be only an error; you will not be tried."

Pierre wheeled to acknowledge the applause. Under its cover he shot at Troiville:

"Be easy, beast! You have ceased to live."

He turned. Merim, like 'Leesah, was smiling. She pointed to the point of the left shoulder where the next knife should go. Like lightning, Pierre launched the blade—a magnificent throw. He swung from there to the difficult casts between the limbs, snugging the fatal weapons close against the fabric of 'Leesah's pretty, ravishing costume.

The eyes of the dead, the fingers of her, guided him to mark out thus the form of the living. Troiville continued to sneer, to taunt. Pierre forgot him, it seemed; the crowd. He took knife after knife, made his hedge of glistening death creep up the outside of 'Leesah's perfect left leg, to the knee, to the mid-thigh, to the thigh, to the waist—saw her smile. The eyes of the dead tured him on; his own eyes had ceased to burn, save for a little.

Wave after wave of applause swept the audience. Two knives yet remained, one for the spot midway between 'Leesah's zone and armpit, one for the armpit. As Pierre drew his arm back for the zone-cast he heard Troiville:

"La Forge, beware the last, the armpit cast. You will miss that and strike her through the heart. You want to kill her, *mon ami!*"

He focused upon the difficult throw. Merim's forefinger was at the exact spot where 'Leesah's flesh and the target board seemed to melt together, midway between zone and armpit. 'Leesah was smiling trustingly. A wave of obstinacy, a desire to show Troiville that his nerve was equal to anything, whelmed Pierre. He cast—

Thud!

The blade was in the wood, its flat gleaming side touching the girl's warm flesh only. A perfect throw.

The café's patrons were wild with enthusiasm.

Pierre was in a delirium of curious ecstasy. He had the one knife clutched by

its sinister carven copper handle. He fended it. He glanced back, turned, bowed to the applauding folk. He let his glance fall to Troiville, and, under cover of the cheers, fled at the captain from a tense mouth-corner:

"If I should miss, *monsieur*, if I should miss, with this last blade, it shall be for you."

He turned suddenly, faced the target board. Merim was at 'Leesah's side, her finger extended, its tip touching the very amput.

Troiville's voice sneered from behind:

"In the heart this time, donkey."

With a blind rage seering his heart, Pierre drew back his arm. As he did so he could see Merim's finger creep in and in. It was over the girl's heart. He sought to escape from the fascination of the fantasy of the desert-born's presence. Her finger seemed to make its end's impress right over where 'Leesah's corsage ended, over the loyal beating heart of her.

"Donkey!"

It was Troiville's culminating sneer!

Pierre's arm tensed. 'Leesah smiled at him, and he could see her, through Merim's veil, that seemed to dangle between them, as if apart from the Bedouin girl's body. Merim's body vanished like a whiff of mist—but her eyes, the eyes of the dead, burned in their place and the slender finger was pinned to 'Leesah's breast. Pierre strove not to throw, then to divert the knife, whose weight seemed to be like a feather's burden.

His arms snapped forward, the hand opened, the blade sped.

"I told you," Troiville sneered.

The fingers, the eyes of the dead, vanished.

There was a dull roar—chairs and tables were overturned.

Old Martin screamed—Pierre started toward 'Leesah.

The knife quivered—a red, red stain trickled from its edge.

The point was buried deeply in the girl's body. Pain slew the smile she tried to keep there, in her loyalty. Then, before any one could come to her, she wilted and sagged and would have crashed downward but that

Pierre caught her in his arms, tenderly eased her from among the hedge of terribly sharp blades, to the floor.

CHAPTER VI.

BEHIND THE GREAT SAND HILL.

PEOPLE surged forward, formed a morbid ring about them. Major Cherimande pushed through. Troiville was close after him, calling:

"I accuse this man of intentionally slaying this woman!"

"Remember you are under heavy accusations yourself," the major warned, pushing the deposed *commandante* aside.

Troiville persisted, as Pierre gazed up at him with heavy eyes:

"Yes; he killed her on purpose, under cover of speed in his act. He took that mode, it was so safe."

"But the motive! He loves her; see his face," the major said, as Pierre, answering some word of the girl's, bent his lips to her mouth, from which the blood was beginning to ooze.

"He had reason to believe she loved another—or at least accorded him privileges that go with love."

'Leesah sighed, her form straightened. They made way for her limbs as they stiffened. Pierre, with face drawn, stood erect. His hand touched the hilt of the breast-piercing knife.

"Permit me—I am an old surgeon," and Major Cherimande bent over. He tested the knife, drew it forth. A welter of blood followed the blade. The girl sighed, went limp. A murmur of pity swept the people. Cherimande dropped the knife on the floor beside her and glanced keenly at La Forge, then at Troiville.

"I insist," Troiville began; "he killed her—he thought she loved another."

"What other?" Cherimande demanded.

"M. le Capitaine will be kind enough to remember!" Pierre warned, his voice ice-like.

"With me; she loved me; we had words over her to-day," Troiville flicked out, venomwise.

"Ah!"

Pierre's hand went to the knife's hilt.

Major Cherimande struck his hand aside and he retrieved the knife. Troiville reiterated:

"I repeat, he did it intentionally."

Pierre straightened up, agile as a panther. He leaned over, slapped Troiville's cheek with a force that reddened it, leaving the mark of each supple finger.

"*Monsieur*, you lie!" he said calmly, clearly.

"You are safe in saying that," Troiville snarled. "An officer of France cannot fight a half-breed—a part-blood—a nobody."

"My father was an officer of the Legion; my mother the daughter of the sheik—of highest desert blood."

"Pah!"

Troiville turned upon his heel and stalked out of the café, and Pierre, held back by Cherimande, became quiet after a few moments.

"Your duty lies—there," he reminded Pierre, pointing to the stricken girl.

La Forge bent over her.

"I thank you for reminding me," he murmured. "She is barely alive. Let me take her to my house across the way. Do with me as you think best."

"You shall remain in your house, under guard, a nominal guard, until I can sift this," the major said quietly. "I do not accuse you."

Pierre's grateful glance thanked him. Stooping, he gathered the limp, inert burden into his strong arms. As he strained forward with it his eyes searched for Merim, but she was nowhere to be seen. His eyes were clear, cool.

"Martin," he called, as he went past the desk where the old man was staring, "box up my knives for me, as usual."

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"And send me a native healer."

"No; get a nurse only; I will attend her," the major said, at his heels.

He carried the girl out of doors, across the dim, star-lighted street. Cherimande ordered all the others back and came after Pierre up the stairs. In the room he laid the silent load down on his divan and cushioned it there. The slender stream of life

trickled into her corsage. Her face was white, drawn. The major tested her breath with a hand-mirror; found that it barely clouded the shimmering surface.

"I fear," Cherimande said, his brows knit, his eyes intent, "the wound is very, very deep. How did it happen?"

"I do not know; I cast as usual; I missed."

So Pierre simply felt that nothing mattered to him now; that there was no use to tell of the apparition of Merim, of his experiences of the night before. They are unbelievable; too eery for a matter-of-fact man of Mars to grasp. And then an inner voice warned him not to speak—something gripped the roots of his tongue and held him mute.

"If you had entered into a long explanation, I should have suspected you more. But as it is, no! Then, no one but Troiville accuses you, and he—well, *monsieur*, I told him plainly when I relieved him of command that the proofs of his villainy against the tribesfolks were complete and that he might best go get himself decently slain than to face the scowl of La Belle France over his black-crimes."

He paused, laid his ear against the wounded breast over which his cool, expert fingers had been straying as he had talked. The steps of a woman were heard on the stair. She came in, one of the bazar healers, shrouded in dun robes.

"Go, now," Cherimande ordered Pierre; "I shall stay a few moments to tell the nurse what to do. You may go where you will, in reason, until I decide what more is to be done. What can be done for her I shall do, *monsieur.*"

Pierre arose softly and went out. Cherimande called to the soldier below:

"Let La Forge pass until further orders."

The stars told Pierre it was almost midnight. Many folk still loitered about the Café Diable. They were quiet, gossiping. He passed in, intent upon ordering a drink. At the desk old Martin twitched his sleeve.

"How is she?" he asked.

"Bad, very bad."

"I am sorry, *monsieur*. You have both

been so good to me. Do you know what I said to Troiville, who was in here a moment ago for cigarettes?"

"No; what?"

"That a man who would take the lie from you should not associate with French soldiers any more. Several officers heard me and echoed my words."

"Ah!"

Pierre passed on, ordered his drink, sipped it. On the way out he stopped and asked:

"Did you cleanse the knife?"

"No, *monsieur*. See!"

He bent, searched under the counter. Pierre heard the knife-box catch click. Then Martin straightened up, the knife held by its sinister carved copper haft. He put it up for inspection. The blade was stained.

"Thanks," and Pierre took the knife quickly, concealing it in his robes. He went out swiftly.

"Good luck!" Martin called after him.

"Good night—perhaps it is good-by, old friend."

The night had become cool. The reek of far-off camel-dung fires came to La Forge's nostrils. His eyes burned. Something impalpable, misty, floated before him. He followed, to the side-opening that led toward the barracks. He was turning the corner, hands outstretched, when he smashed into some one. He struck blindly.

"The second time to-night," he heard Troiville's searing voice, "you have left a mark on my cheek, M. le-Murderer!"

Behind Troiville tramped a half-dozen noisy soldiers, sous officers.

Pierre coolly struck again.

"*Sang de Christ! Thrice!* I call on you to witness, gentlemen, that I am in the right! I challenge you."

"It is time you defended your honor," a grizzled sergeant said.

"Thanks, *monsieur*. A *outrance!*" said Pierre joyfully but calm.

"Come. We need no seconds."

"No! I prefer not."

"But, gentlemen, you cannot go aside and murder each other without seconds,

witnesses," a half-sobered, downy-lipped officer interposed.

"That is for us to settle, *tiens?*" Troiville snarled. "*Alons!*"

"Oblige us, gentlemen," Pierre pleaded.

"What is this?"

It was Cherimande's voice. He came into the dimmer passage quickly.

"These two would go aside to fight, without seconds," the young officer began.

"So," and the veteran swept the two with appraising glances that the half-gloom of the little street failed to veil entirely.

"Well, Troiville, you know what I told you this afternoon."

Troiville's hand went up, in salute.

"*Oui, mon colonel!*"

"Well, then, you are a splendid shot—"

"He," pointing at Pierre, "is the challenged. He has the choice of weapons."

"I am armed," Pierre said quietly, his hand going under his robe to the sinister copper-carven hilt. The major pressed his gun upon Captain Troiville, who demurred at first. Cherimande crisply ordered:

"Here; take my service revolver; you are accustomed to use such." Major Cherimande plucked it from his belt. "Gentlemen," to the tipsy group, "good night. Troiville—good-by! I salute—your uniform. It is a calm night. The tracks on the sand will tell if the victor fought loyally. A veteran will know." He saluted gravely.

Troiville saluted. Pierre swung in beside him. They went off, up the twisty street, toward the caravansary.

"By the great sand hill, *monsieur?*" Pierre inquired as they passed the rest-place.

"As well there as anywhere," Troiville said, "but I warn you I shall shoot to kill. I never miss with my pistols. I desire your life."

Pierre was silent.

They passed beyond the ragged, outlying mud huts, beyond the first little sand hillocks. They did not talk. Pierre felt a great peace in his heart. His eyes were cool, keen, alert. His nerves were icy solid. Often Troiville scuffed the sand with his boot-toes as they trudged.

A sharp phrase from Troiville made

Pierre look ahead. Beside the great sand hill, looming now close at hand, were tents—hair tents. The peculiar deep rumbling that told of dromedaries was heard. There was the *tump-tump, bump-e-dee-tump!* of a slightly beaten drum; the thin skirl of a reed pipe.

"It appears we shall be interrupted," Troiville said.

"Not necessarily," Pierre drawled. "We can skirt their camp and finish our little affair on the farther edge of the giant sand hill."

A jackal fled from before them, howling. A bat dropped from mid air, squeaked in their faces as they paused, then winged away on spider-webbed pinions, gray, mysteriously vague. The drum throbbed; the pipe keened.

"As you will, *monsieur*," Troiville acquiesced. They turned aside, began to skirt the camp. The dromedaries rumbled. The reek of the fires came to Pierre; the thirst of the night before crept into his throat; a fierce urge was on him to go forward. Monody of drum was slashed by overtones of pipe.

Among the tents men called; camel-drivers sang to the herd. The jackal, afar now, howled anew, over toward the big hill.

CHAPTER VII.

OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH.

THEY came to the foot of the hill without being disturbed.

"Do we oblige each other in the dark or wait for the dawn?" Troiville asked, fingering his gun as he spoke.

"As you wish, *monsieur*," was the level answer.

They faced the sand hill.

A towering shape detached itself from the desert floor and stood erect.

"Will you come to my camp and have refreshments?" a resonant but menacing voice inquired. The language was Arabic of the purest.

He came forward, his white robes now showing plainly. His white beard rippled on his chest.

"The Sheik Ben Yousef!" Troiville cried out.

"Yes, M. Troiville. But come in peace. I am but here to present my case before the new *commandante*, who I hear is in El Yaoub. If I attacked you my case would be hurt. Who is with you?"

"Do you not know me?" Pierre called. "The man who called on you last night, when your daughter Merim danced—"

"My daughter danced! You are mad, mad! The daughters of the desert-born dance not before strangers."

La Forge was silent, amazed. He heard tamour, pipe, distantly.

"I am but here a day after burying my daughter, who died as I was journeying hither, warned by a messenger who rode out to Zin, to be here at your preliminary trial," the old sheik said, his voice menacing, calm, deeply resonant. "But what is your business here, at my camp?"

"We had a little—business between us," Pierre said shortly.

"Ah, yes. Well, then, settle it. It is none of mine. I shall go back to my prayers."

He sank down again, seeming to fade into the very earth as he settled against the tawny, moon-kissed desert floor. The weird music among the tents ceased suddenly.

Troiville turned to Pierre.

"Eh, *monsieur*?"

"At your service."

The taste of the avid urge that had come from the drink of the previous night mounted onto Pierre's palate. He thought of pomegranate sherbet, of red wine, of scarlet flowers, of blood.

"How shall we order the affair?"

"As you will, *monsieur*."

"Is there light enough?"

"I am in white. You can scarcely miss me. You are in your uniform, not so good a mark, but I seldom miss a cast."

"A cast?"

"Yes."

"Then you have a knife, no pistol?"

"I never miss with one of my blades, I beg to remind you."

The yearning for one more drink of that strange fluid came to Pierre. His throat was raw, raging, dry.

"Well, fool, I beg to remind you that I shall kill you, then. I, who am the crack shot of my regiment, cannot miss you, in white, in this light, at—what number of paces?"

"Shall we say fifty? I can split bangles at fifty, you know."

"Just my distance, *monsieur*. I shoot well at that distance."

The jackal, nearer at hand, howled.

"Sheik, we call upon you to act as witness," Troiville called. "We are about to fight a duel. Do you hear?"

"Yes, O captain. A duel! How odd! To kill each other over the place where death itself resides! There is a firm station for you, captain, twenty-five paces away, where you feel a stone underfoot. Stand on it when you fire. It is *sure death*! What do the desert-born-care how you aliens kill yourselves off?"

His chuckle came to them, like the rasping of dry, bleached bones.

Pierre felt his eyes burn again. He felt buoyed up, elate.

"Let us stand, back to back, and at a word from the sheik walk each twenty-five paces," Troiville suggested. "At a second word we halt, at a third we wheel, and then act as seems best. Count the paces aloud, in time."

"I accept your conditions," Pierre said eagerly.

"How pleasant it is to order an affair like this," the old man grated, arising and grasping each by an arm. He swung them about, back to back, with surprising strength, Pierre could sense. He caught the glow of the old man's deep-set eyes, heard again his chuckle. He felt Troiville's tense back against his. Ben Yousef stepped from the line of fire, cleared his deep throat.

"Now!"

The sheik's command sounded hollowly. They began to pace from each other. They counted in unison.

At the twenty-fifth pace Troiville paused. He felt a great stone under his feet. He slid his feet over it and sought to mark out its limits. He waited for the second word.

"Again!"

It was the sheik, commanding again.

The two wheeled, to face each other. Pierre could see the loom of his antagonist, but not his form clearly. To Troiville La Forge was a plain target, in his white robes, outlined against the sand hill's umbers.

La Forge felt his eyes burning! He saw a mist, a cloud, pass between him and Troiville. His eyes burned anew. Afar the jackal howled. The old sheik chuckled softly.

Beside Troiville Merim stood. She smiled at Pierre!

Her veil was up. Her eyes seemed to be plainly in view—and they were shrunken, phosphorescent. He could see that Troiville had seen nothing uncommon. He heard his pistol click to full-cock. Pierre whipped out his great knife, holding it by its copper carven haft, steadily.

"Now!"

The death command of the old Arab resounded hollowly.

Pierre's arm shot back. His nerves were steady.

Troiville, he could see, had leveled his pistol.

The old Arab laughed menacingly.

"You are slow, O Franks!" he called.

Pierre saw Merim's arm steal out, out, until her forefinger pointed to the fatal spot on Troiville's breast, right over the heart.

There came a flash—a searing, tearing sensation along the side of Pierre's skull. He swayed as the pistol crashed again. He glanced at his antagonist, then his arm all but faltered. Still the appearance was pointing her slender finger and the urge came upon him to make his cast.

Again the gun cracked.

Troiville's curse at the miss came to Pierre. He tensed his arm, launched the great whirring, whizzing blade.

It arched over, flaming in the moon-sheen like a mighty brand.

Thud!

The pain in Pierre's eyes ceased. The mist-form of the desert-born floated away. He was upright. The old Arab, laughing crazily, stepped toward Troiville as the officer crashed forward on his face.

Ben Yousef was nimble, reaching the body before Pierre could. Even as Pierre

sped, he heard the great drum throb, the reed-pipes keening, and their rhythm was merry now.

Pierre reached Troiville as Ben Yousef turned the body over. The sinister, copper-carven handle of the knife was at rest, right over the cleft heart. He bent over. The sheik sank down onto the desert floor, took the body onto his lap. He tore open the coat-front, the shirt. He plucked out the blade, handed it to Pierre, whose throat was parched, avid. La Forge hid the fatal blade in his robes. The merry music among the tents ceased.

Ben Yousef drew a cup from his robes, from some mysterious fold in them. The split breast of the slain man was spouting—the Arab caught a cup of the crimson life, tide, whose surplus made a dark pool on the moonlit sands.

Ben Yousef let the body roll off his lap, sprang erect, holding the cup. Fascinated, Pierre stood up. Ben Yousef stretched forth his right hand toward the south in compelling gesture and murmured:

"Merim! Come, O Dawn Star of Zin!"

Pierre's eyeballs burned. A misty shape floated out of nothingness. He saw her come to the old man's side. Her veil was over her back.

"Here is the cup; here is the guest. Share it with him," Ben Yousef ordered.

She took the cup, raised it to her perfect lips. Her lambent eyes glowed. Pierre saw Ben Yousef tugging at the ring in the great stone atop which Troiville had stood while firing. He saw the stone raised; with a single vigorous heave laid back. Then the body was gone, the stone in place again. He glanced back at the shape. She was taking the cup from her lips.

"Drink, you; share the cup as before," she pleaded, her voice deep, full, resonant, yet oddly hollow. Her eyes glowed like foxfire.

He tried to turn aside. He felt her arm go about his neck, felt himself drawn by her powers, urged by the terrible avidness of his thirst. He tried not to yield, yet yielded. Her lips touched the rim of the top-ended cup, from which drops were trickling. Ben Yousef erect, chuckled dryly. The jackal howled.

As the first taste of the liquid touched his lips, Pierre felt his mighty thirst assuaged, his eyeballs ceased to pain him. He reeled from her arms, fell prone—heard a rasping, as of dry bones—a distant chuckle.

The cocks in El Yaoub began to crow sleepily!

The sudden dawn smote him into consciousness. Something was trickling down his throat. He stirred. A venerable old man was bending over him, a cup in his hand. He smiled and spoke, in excellent Arabic:

"Drink this pomegranate sherbet, O stranger. I found you here, senseless but now, as we came in to pitch camp. I am the Sheik Ben Yousef, come here to attend the trial of Captain Troiville, charged with misuse of one of the maidens of our tribe. Do you know if the French *Commissionnaire Generale* is here to hear the case? The decision will be too late, I fear; the maiden has died."

Pierre got up, gazed about, dazed. The camp was there; the great sandhill. There was no stone in the sand, though. He felt for his knife. He pulled it out. The blade was stained—*blood-hued!*

"I thank you. Yes, Major Cherimande is at El Yaoub. I must go; I am recovered now," Pierre found himself saying.

The old man got up, stroked his beard softly.

"Go in peace," he said, benignly.

"Peace," said Pierre, stumbling off.

As he went he thought he heard a dry, rasping chuckle. But he did not turn back.

The street before his own rooms was quiet when Pierre strode up to the buildings.

He was about to go up-stairs when a sentry barred his way.

"Not so fast, *monsieur*; softly, softly! The major requests silence most profound."

"Then."

"The case is desperate, *monsieur*. Softly. Softly!"

He let Pierre by.

With laggard steps La Forge mounted.

As he went a great wave of tenderness swept over him. His hand fumbled a bit at the door. It was drawn open. Cherimande's hand went over his mouth.

"Hush, *monsieur*! Come, but silently as death."

He stepped inside. The divan where *she* was was screened in.

"And Troiville?" the major demanded,

For reply Pierre took out the reddened knife and held it up. The major took it, laid it on an ottoman that was behind the door.

"He will not be back?" he asked.

"No."

"Best! For him and for France. There need be no trial now!"

A low, moaning cry came from behind the screen. The Arab healer put her head around the screen's bulge, saying:

"She calls again—for him."

The major pushed Pierre forward. He stumbled toward that which he feared to behold. "Come out now, Fadma," the major called.

The healer slunk away quietly as he came behind the screen.

Pierre sank down on his knees beside the wan, limp girl. Her breast, bare, showed the weal of the knife-stroke. He bent over to listen to faint breathing. She opened her eyes.

"Ah, *mon chère*," she whispered; "it is so good to have you here. If I go, I want to have you know that—that I do not blame you. You did not put your blade into me on purpose. *Non! Non!* Your hand trembled; you missed, that is all. I have told the major so! I want you to know, before I go—I feel so weak, *mon chère*, but do not worry, Pierre. And forgive me."

"Forgive you, *'Leesah!* You who have been so loyal."

"*Non! Non!* I have not been so loyal. I have flirted with this one and that because—"

"Because?"

"I wanted you to be a little jealous—to cease from our strictly friendly relations—to—to—ah, Pierre, I am so weak—good-bye!"

Her eyes closed. The tide of pallor crept up from her bosom to her face. Only her ripe lips had color in them.

Pierre staggered from behind the screen, eyes staring, voice pleading:

"Major!"

Cherimande came forward hastily. He darted behind the screen.

Pierre, mutely submissive, waited. He heard the old soldier fume and sputter. Then came out; booming:

"Pouf, for you, dolt, triple idiot, to let her talk so much that she should faint. Your blade was turned by a rib. She will recover—if you do not slay her with your clumsiness. Away with you, *monsieur*, and do not come back until you have learned to restrain yourself and to thank God for the gift of such a woman's love!"

Pierre heard her sigh behind the screen. He peeped in at her, saw her great eyes flutter open. She saw him—formed a kiss on her now white lips, wafted him one little word with her faint breath. He turned, and staggered to the stairs, drunk with happiness. As he passed his mirror he glanced in. His eyes were normal, full, clear. He went out onto the street.

The faint rose-flush of dawn was in the sky. The cocks were crowing. Peace was in La Forge's heart. The way was smooth before him!

(The end.)

SPRING'S SYMPHONY

LEND me your song, ye nightingales! Oh, pour
The mazy running soul of melody
Into my varied verse! while I deduce
From the first note the hollow cuckoo sings
The symphony of spring.

Thomson

Miss Angel

by Katharine Eggleston

Author of "Bully Bess," "Flaming Hearts," "The Girl in Khaki," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

EDWARD WHARTON thought he had killed Arch Clayton in a quarrel over the last can of tomatoes while they are snowbound in a shack. Fleeing the place, Wharton sought refuge in the Neck-and-Neck ranch-house, whose sole occupant at the time, Dewilde Capet, found on him an envelope inscribed "Arch Clayton." The latter is the man who tried to get the better of her uncle in the matter of a valuable formula for a pain-killer, and under the mistaken impression that he is a foe of her family the girl drove Wharton forth in spite of the fact that his personality drew her to him strongly. Morg Martin, a rich young fellow of the neighborhood, hut rough of speech, found Clayton, not dead, hut nearly so, in the shack, and succeeded in transferring him to the ranch-house, where, discovering that both Dewilde and Martin believed Wharton to be Clayton, he did not undeceive them, but added fuel to their hatred of the man by relating that he had done his best to kill him. Morg Martin vowed vengeance and started in pursuit of the "villain." Meanwhile Wharton, bewildered in the snow, found himself back at a lean-to of the ranch-house, and possessed himself of Dewilde's pony, Switches, leaving a note for the girl—which she did not see—explaining that he was taking the horse in order to reach a point where he could rehabilitate himself and return—worthy of her. Giving the cayuse his head, he was carried to Ellsworth and to the home of Mrs. Mosher, where a telegram informed him he had been left sole heir to his aunt's fortune. The first train after the storm being due, Wharton set out to catch it with the good wishes of Mrs. Mosher, who took him for one of Dewilde's swell Eastern beaux. Morg Martin appeared on his chase after the supposed Clayton, learned of Wharton's call, demanded to know his whereabouts from Mrs. Mosher, then, hearing the whistle of the engine, leaped for the door, exclaiming, "Damn you, he's going off in that train!"

CHAPTER IX.

AN ANGRY PURSUER.

MORGAN-MARTIN ran with all the odds against him, but the determination to get the murderer and horse-thief who was rushing away to claim the fortune of the man he had killed. Morg jerked his gun from its holster.

If he could not get the man alive, he had made up his mind to get him dead. To get him anyway.

Meantime Wharton and Mosher struggled up onto the platform. When the smoker came even with where they stood, a man leaped off.

"Git on if you're going! 'Tain't goin' to stop!"

Martin in turn reached the platform. He saw one of two tall figures make a dive

for the rear of the passing smoker. He lifted his gun and fired.

Wharton heard the bullet sing past his ear. A voice rang out above the rattle of the train.

"I'll git on and nab him!"

His hand rested on the handle of the car door. For a fraction of a second he stood. Then his tall figure vaguely outlined against the door, sank out of sight in the shadows.

Morg reached the edge of the platform just as the rear of the train rolled by, gripped the hand-rail and swung on.

For twenty minutes he battered and banged at the rear door to get some one to let him in.

Finally a brakeman came to his rescue, unwittingly.

"Great guns! What're you—"

"I'm after a murderer! He's on this

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for April 2.

train! Keep mum; but bring the conductor back!"

The words and Morg's manner were convincing. The train force was not unaccustomed to exercising their prerogative as officers of the law. The brakeman scuttled ahead.

Morg flung himself into a seat and stuck his cold feet against the steam-pipe. He proposed to make the arrest of Arch Clayton a perfectly orderly and legal one. It was not the way he preferred; but he had a motive. Dewilde Capet would have a better impression of him if the justice that was to be visited on Clayton were executed legally, rather than in his impulsive fashion.

The conductor came back. Martin introduced himself. The conductor knew of him as the big man of the country round about.

"There's a criminal on this train, got on at Ellsworth. I'll leave it to you whether you want to arrest him or keep quiet and watch him while you wire ahead—how about the lines to Poindexter?"

"Ellsworth agent says they're all right. No trouble on east," the conductor answered, falling into the staccato of Morg's speech.

"Get Sheriff Walsh. This man's a murderer. It's a big catch. There's a black record against him. He—"

The conductor interrupted.

"Train didn't stop at Ellsworth."

"This man jumped on. He's in the smoker," Morg cut in.

The conductor and the brakeman looked at each other. Martin was an important person to contradict; but neither of them agreed with him.

"Mr. Martin, the agent swung off; but we didn't stop to take on passengers. We're too late as it is; we're making a straight run through to Caswell. Got to be done to let the through train have right-of-way."

"I tell you I saw this man get on. He's tall. I fired at him. If I hit him, he's crumpled down on the platform outside the smoker—the front end."

Without an instant's parley the three men started forward. The brakeman flung the door wide and flashed his lantern over the platform. It was empty.

But Morg was not convinced. He pushed out on the platform and looked down on the steps. There was no sign of the huddled form he had expected to see.

"I saw him, I tell you! I saw him fall. He—maybe he wasn't hurt bad enough to be put out of commission. He's in the car!"

"What does he look like?" the conductor asked. "We've had some chance to get acquainted with the passengers this trip, I tell you. I guess we could spot a new one, especially if he was wounded!"

They made the search. Both conductor and brakeman knew that their passenger-list had not been augmented. They said so in no uncertain terms when Morg's anger and amazement at losing his quarry slightly overstepped the bounds. Reluctantly they assisted in a search of every possible place where a fugitive might hide. Still the result was disappointing to Martin.

"I'll get off at Poindexter," he announced finally.

"You'll jump off then! We don't stop."

Morg glared at the conductor.

"I guess you'll stop!" he snapped.

"Guess again!" the conductor replied, turning and going on about his business.

Morg slouched down in a seat, completely overcome. All he could think of was that Clayton lay beside the track at Ellsworth where he must have rolled when the bullet caught him.

The thought was maddening. Every revolution of the wheels that bore him swiftly away from Clayton was torment. He tried to comfort himself with the idea that no one would discover the fellow, that his wound would bleed profusely and that he would thus be eliminated from the love affair of Morg Martin.

But it was no use. He strode forward and sought the conductor again. He ordered him to slow down so that it would be possible to spring from the train without accident. But the conductor was obdurate.

Argument was wasted. Much as Morg used the railroad, his patronage did not have to be secured by favor. He had no other means of marketing his cattle. He stormed and tried to bribe; but the conductor turned a deaf ear.

Morg's rage was almost wordless. Up before him flashed the chance he was riding away from, the chance to catch and rid himself of his rival. In the distorted abandon of his imagination to the impressions of his jealousy, he had accepted Arch Clayton as a dire menace to his success with Dewilde. That she could love a man who had maltreated her uncle and tried to kill another man had ceased to be a matter for argument. She was a woman; she would love the man she loved in spite of his shortcomings. Her love would only be overcome by the removal of the man. Then, a man who loved her consumingly would have his innings.

It was a barbarous, primitive way of looking at it; but it was Morg Martin's way. Close to the surface in his consciousness was the belief that a woman could be won by the oldest of all methods, the way of force and dominance.

He sat swearing under his breath while the train rolled mile after mile away from the place where his presence was imperative. With a grim self-scorn, he thought of the easy way in which he had fooled himself when he moved through the very furrow in the snow that Clayton had made. He had told himself that it was not his man because a horse's tracks accompanied his. His man had no horse. And all the time, Switches, Dewilde's own pony, was guiding the criminal to haven.

Meanwhile stretched in the snow beside the track, Edward Wharton lay as still as a dead man.

But he was very much alive. The words that Morg had shouted acted like a clamp holding him tight to the soft bed into which he had fallen.

"'Nab' me! I guess not!" his thoughts ran.

Of course the singing bullet had injected a special significance into the words. He could not make out who would be in pursuit of him under the circumstances; but that bullet announced that his pursuer had a deep and deadly intention.

It could scarcely be the postmaster. They had talked amicably as they plowed through the snow to the station. He could have

shot him when the shooting was easier if he had wanted to.

But somebody had. And the somebody must have seen him dive off the opposite side of the train.

Then an explanation flashed into his abnormally active mind which seemed to gain power as he held his body rigid. *She* had informed. *She* had gone to the lean-to. She had found his note. And she had guessed that the pony would take him to town.

And that person whose horse's nose he had seen had been to the house and reported about Clayton. The note had convicted him. She had sent the person post-haste on his trail. The deep marks of his own and the pony's route had been easy to follow.

She had acted instantly; she would. For she would think first that justice should be done. Would she keep his note and would she notice that he had asked her to think him less black than circumstances would indicate?

Then Wharton realized that the train was almost out of hearing and that there had been no rush from the platform across the track in search of him. He grinned at the cold moon, scudding from cloud to cloud as if fearful of being seen.

The unexpected had happened. His pursuer had jumped on the train believing him still there.

But though he had this pleasant notion, Wharton lay still. He heard the diminishing voices of the two men he knew to be on the platform. He wondered how soon a search would be concluded and the train stopped to allow the man who shot at him to return.

Exactly one way of possible escape lay open to him. Mosher had told him of the gang with the snow-plow out along the track westward. He thought a bit longingly of the telegraph instrument in the little station. But this was no time to risk making his presence known by wiring eastward to secure his inheritance. The more and the sooner he put distance between him and this particular place, the better his chance would be of realizing on his aunt's generosity eventually.

Stooping to avoid possible detection, he struck off along the ditch beside the track.

CHAPTER X.

TWO COUNTS CHECKED OFF.

DEWILDE went into the house after her discovery of Switches's absence.

Her eyes sought instantly the tenant of the bunk. He was asleep.

Silently she went across the room and looked at him. His color was more human, less like the ghastly white of a time-bleached bit of plaster.

In spite of her mental decision against the man who had dared to make love to her, she felt a warm rush of gratitude for the improvement in this other man's appearance. She wanted him to live and yet she was ashamed of the reason that stimulated the desire.

Clayton, lying in the warm comfort of Capet's bunk, slept on. The day glowed outside. A light, warm wind blew. And the snow circled and eddied in it as if the golden day were amusing itself with the new and glittering toy.

Clayton waked and saw her before the fire, an Indian basket in her lap and her head bent above the glove she was mending. He studied her.

The plan he had half thought out of trying to supplant Morg Martin in her good graces and of securing information about the formula seemed as futile as plans do when they are made without a knowledge of the one who plays a chief part therein.

He tried to talk to her; but she discouraged him with a courteous but definite reserve that he had not the social art to overcome.

Compared with Morgan Martin, Clayton knew he shone. But he knew also that Morgan Martin was deceived by the comradeship which he enjoyed into a false idea that he and this girl had something in common. He was assuming that he could win the moon because it shone on him.

"Miss Capet, I'd—I'd like to explain that—that I had no idea of the character of this—this Arch Clayton when I undertook to—"

"Do not concern yourself about anything but getting strong enough to—to get up," she, replied.

"Strong enough to get out is what you mean, Miss Capet," Clayton could not refrain from saying rather sullenly.

He had that trait of men who like always to seem to know things even though the knowledge is not flattering to themselves; it is the spirit that likes to believe that nothing can be put over on them.

She did not answer; and he registered the snub. He felt that he was there on tolerance, that pity and humane motives alone accounted for the care she gave him. He was used to regarding himself as not unattractive to women. Altogether she bruised and bumped against his self-love till he began to dislike her.

Dewilde's actions and the little she said was colored by such thoughts as he did not suspect. When she felt herself yielding to warm, human interest in assisting him, she suspected that she did it because of that other man. He would be saved from the crime of murder if she won her charge back to health.

"Have you—have you known this Arch Clayton long?" she finally brought herself to ask.

It was night again. The red blaze of the fire shed its rose-toned illusion over the bare room. To Dewilde the place seemed permeated with the peculiar restfulness that she had experienced the night before when Arch Clayton was there.

"No, not long. He's a soldier of fortune, I imagine. That's a polite name for an adventurer, you know." Clayton wondered why she had at last addressed him about something other than his comfort.

"Then why did you associate yourself with him?" she asked instantly.

"I didn't know what he was up to. I thought he had a right to what he was coming after. He gave me the impression that he was the heir to some old man's money or something valuable. He just wanted company; and I came along."

"He—how do you know that he is—an adventurer?" she questioned, flinging a log on the fire to cover her confusion.

But Clayton grasped the fact that the

girl was deeply interested, and it added to his bitterness.

"He's one of the 'handsome brute' kind of men. I didn't know anything about him till we traveled together from Denver. He got to telling me about himself. He's been everywhere and done everything and everybody. He boasts about his triumphs with women. They take to his size; and he plays up the hero stuff and then laughs at them because they fall for it!"

Dewilde saw through to the man's intention; but she felt cheapened by his suspicion that Clayton had made an impression on her.

"What did you do to make him attack you?"

She had no intention of saying the words; they seemed to speak themselves. For a second, the real Clayton was silent, taken so completely by surprise that he could not find words to reply.

"Well?" she urged, following up the unexpected lead that her unmanaged tongue had taken.

"He wanted the tomatoes!" Clayton replied.

Dewilde remembered how the conversations she had had with Arch Clayton swung around tomatoes, how he had disliked them. She had kicked the can that was probably the cause of the quarrel.

When she became conscious of something besides her hurrying thoughts the real Clayton was eying her, with cynical amusement.

"Mr. Clayton made a deep impression on you, I guess," he ventured.

For a moment she was wordless. Then her head went up as high as her slender neck would lift it; the scintillant beauty of her eyes blazed; her breast rose and stayed lifted with the soft fulness of a bird's.

"He did. I trust that impression in spite of circumstances."

Every word crisped up with a positiveness that seemed exulting in defiance to Clayton.

"This isn't substantial evidence against him?" he queried, pointing to his discolored temple.

"A man isn't always to blame for the injury he inflicts!" she retorted.

She saw the other's eyelids quiver, his lips grow tense. Clayton had a swift and painful proof of a fact he had never more than half credited that a woman's intuition goes straight to the truth where logic often limps and falls short.

"I guess the way he treated me is not the only count against him!" he observed, a defense that was an acknowledgment of her assertion.

"Anyway, there is one less."

Dewilde said it coolly; she did not add that Clayton had shown no disposition to lighten the count. But he knew she thought it; and the antagonism between them began to crystallize into actual dislike.

Clayton canvassed the situation. He felt better, so much better that he rose from the bunk and made a devious way to the bench by the fireplace. He had held himself down till the nerves in him twitched and jerked; his mind was divided between the rôle of invalid and that of well man which would enable him to get away as soon as possible.

If he stayed on he had a chance to hunt for the formula; but he risked Morgan Martin's return after his discovery that the real criminal was luxuriating under the roof of the Neck-and-Neck ranch-house. Clayton had no desire to be there should Morg come back with the knowledge that would make gun-play the natural form of expression.

He slumped down on the bench and thought about it. Nothing disturbed the quiet till Dewilde set a bowl of warm milk before him and placed a plate of bread beside it.

"Good night!" she said as she finished with her preparations for his comfort.

He muttered a good night to her. She crossed the room and picked up a roll of blankets, then carried them as far as the other door and laid them down on the floor while she put on her coat and stocking-cap.

"You're not going out in the storm?" Clayton asked.

"I'm going to the shack. I'll be in to get breakfast for you."

Clayton's tongue almost shaped a sentence.

"This nouse was big enough for you and Arch Clayton!"

But his better judgment prevailed though his self-love suffered the shock of her intention to get away from him.

Dewilde made her way through the silver night. Its glory permeated her sight as music melts into the ears.

And, equipped with those new wings that wafted her thought in one direction, her mind turned to Wharton. Would he feel this night? He would. She was sure the silver glory of outstretched plains under the luminous shower of the moonlight must sink and sing in him as it did in her.

It was well on to morning when Dewilde waked. Her gray eyes were wide; she listened intently.

There was a sound outside. It sounded like an awkward kind of knock at the door of the shack. The blood rushed into her face; and she twisted and jerked herself out of the tight clasp of her blankets.

Again the sound! There was no mistaking; it was Switches. He was the only creature who made just that kind of an appeal for attention. She leaped up.

Then she stopped short. Switches! Switches had left the Neck-and-Neck in bad company. Was the company with him, outside there, keeping still while the pony made investigations? Had the bad company come back to find out whether the man he had struck was dead or not?

She had heard tales of criminals returning, drawn by some fascination, to the scenes of their crimes. But somehow they did not fit this case.

Maybe he was sorry he had stolen her pony!

Impulsively she flung open the door. Switches, alone, stood there in the gray dawn. She flung her arms around the pony's neck and sobbed into his mane.

"Switches, honey, did you get away from him? Or did he let you go—to come back to me?"

But, intelligent as Switches was, he could not answer. What he had done was quite unusual except that the snow was exceptional. He had made a trip from Mrs. Mosher's to his mistress; he could see no cause for such marked celebration.

Then Dewilde stood back and looked him over to see if he were as good as ever. And she saw a small salt-bag dangling like the pendant to a necklace of heavy twine that was around Switches's neck.

She tore it loose and found a note inside. Her heart beat like a trip-hammer till she saw Minnie Mosher's writing.

Am sending Switches home. Gentleman caught train. Morg did, too. He certainly is some goat. I'll come out as soon as Hank can fix up a sled. I am going to bring you back to town.

Very resp.,
MINNIE MOSHER.

Dewilde stared at the words. "Gentleman" must mean her late guest, Arch Clayton. And Morg was on the train with him. She could not think of their meeting calmly. Waves of fear went over her. What would happen?

And no word of Mr. Nemo! For a second everything went black before her. Then grabbing tight hold of Switches's mane she moved away through the snow.

The pony, with the direct action of the empty stomach, made for the lean-to. Dewilde plowed along beside him, swinging herself over the snow now and then by clinging to his neck. She was grateful for some strenuous physical exertion that relieved her from the sense of impending disaster.

And her conscience beat a dreary tattoo into her brain. "It's what he deserves; you ought to be ashamed!" were the words into which the reproach shaped itself.

Switches went over the two-by-four that formed the threshold of his dwelling-place with that grateful celerity which testifies to the joy of getting back to bed and board. Dewilde patted him; he was all she had left.

She pulled hay down for him from the little mow above his manger and, as she did so, a paper caught beneath the long splinter flapped for notice. Wonderingly, she drew it forth and read slowly:

I love you, Miss Angel.

The first words stood out in the bold writing; they burned their way into the sensitive records of her mind.

With a gasp of relief that was like the sob of a child who has been held in fear-thrall, she read about his taking Switches. He had not meant to steal the pony.

The man in the house was not dead or going to die. Switches was back. Dewilde unconsciously counted on her fingers as she tabulated the crimes of which her disturbing guest was not guilty. Two counts against him were checked off.

But the other, his inhuman desertion of Mr. Nemo, his dastardly use of the old scientist's agony for his own ends. It was more barbarous than either of the others. She told herself slowly he was not a murderer; he was not a horse-thief. He was—a brute.

And Morgan Martin, with two guns and an aim almost perfect in its deadly accuracy, was on the train with the brute.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SNOW-PLOW GANG.

THE brute was trudging westward along a route that led exactly away from the pursuer who was disgruntledly rolling eastward. And the trudging was work.

But Wharton had thought cannily of what had happened. Some one was after him. The one reason any one could have for sniping at him was what he had done to Clayton. He realized that he was a hunted man and must bury his identity till he could get quite beyond the country where his culminating misfortune had overtaken him.

He had trudged stolidly along the track for hours. It seemed to him that an endless night just dragged and dragged and dragged itself on. He lost the power to remember anything but night. He could not anticipate.

It was still dark when he saw ahead of him the flare of light on snow. He stopped, for the instant contemplating a roundabout way to avoid men and the menace they represented.

Then he caught up his stampeding senses. Was he to dodge and duck the rest of his life? Display of fear would draw to him

the very attention and the suspicion he dreaded. He had seen it happen.

Bracing to meet, with all of the power of his keen wit and the strength of his muscles, whatever it was that stood there in his route, he moved noiselessly ahead.

"You got yer chanst; an' you ain't got the nerve to take it!"

It seemed as if the shadows were talking to him. Wharton paused and listened.

"I ain't so sure he's got the pay-envelope on him!" another voice observed.

Wharton knew then that he was listening to a conversation that did not concern him in the least. Yet he stood still and waited. It was too strange a place for a conference and the time too unusual for him to pass by.

"I tell you I seen the express-agent of that train give it to him. I heard him say what it was. What more d'ye want?"

"Well, ain't we waited here all night fur him to go to Ellsworth?" the other asked.

"Yep, we have. But seems like he ain't went," the first voice admitted.

"An' they ain't no use tryin' to git me to pull off anything raw right among the bunch!"

"Seems zif he'd git to Ellsworth in time to git back by mornin'!" the first voice grumbled.

"Say, mates, you'll get in worse than you've ever been if you fool with any pay-envelopes!"

Wharton's voice came like a thunder-clap to the two men who had believed themselves safe from being overheard. They stood for a brief instant, dumfounded. Then, with a unanimity that showed they believed themselves in the power of some one they must put beyond hurting them, they "rushed" the newcomer.

Wharton dodged them both. Then he tried to argue with them.

"Look here, I'm not tryin' to get you!" he called out from the shadows. "I'm just givin' you some good advice!"

"Like hell you are!" was growled at him.

The two men came at him again, secure in numbers and evidently purposing to quiet him without the use of firearms.

Wharton realized that this was no mild encounter.

And he was not up to his usual form.

He was tired with the long day and night tramp. But the nasty methods of fighting that the two practised against him roused every ounce of fight in him.

He managed to hold his own too long to suit the men. They growled warnings to each other about not using their guns. But the lust for triumph at any price began to sing through their veins and blot out caution.

Wharton stumbled when one man was attacking him in front and the other worrying him behind. As he fell forward, clutching at his man, his hands slid along his body. The man's clothes were those of a track-laborer, not of a ranchman or cow-puncher.

"I haven't a gun; and you haven't, so don't get puffy!" he yelled as he struggled to his feet in spite of their united efforts to hold him down.

Relieved of the menace of dirty gun work, Wharton let out a whoop that rang like a bugle-call.

"Shut up!" one of the men commanded, clutching for his throat.

"Make me!" Wharton snarled and again he yelled till the night rang.

What Wharton had hoped happened. An answering halloo came. He had reached the neighborhood of the snow-plow that had released the train.

For a second the two men paused in their assault. Then they lit into him with redoubled fury. It was the vicious attack of those who saw their triumph vanishing and snatched a last opportunity to do for the one who had outwitted them.

But the purring click of something with wheels that moved along the rails insinuated its warning between the guttural swear words.

"The track-velocipede!" Wharton heard the first voice call as the hammering fists ceased their beating.

A second later he stood alone and wavering on the track. His eyes were fastened on the little headlight of the approaching machine.

He stood still in the road-bed, waving his arms that felt as if they weighed tons each. The velocipede stopped. A man leaped off and, with a gun in his hand, came toward Wharton.

"What's up?"

"Two men—going to rob the man with the pay-envelope as he—as he went to—to Ellsworth. I told 'em not to; and they lit into me!"

The man with the pay-envelope in his pocket listened to the information with peculiar interest.

"They're men from the snow-plow gang," Wharton said as he regained his breath. "Wore overalls, no guns. Lit out when they heard you coming."

"Who are you?" the foreman of the snow-plow gang asked, his eyes piercing the darkness and measuring the superior height and breadth of the shadow from which the voice came.

"Oh, just a cow-puncher! Got snowed in at Ellsworth an' didn't want to wait till to-morrow night to git on west," Wharton answered.

He talked with the indifferent ease of the men among whom he claimed a place temporarily. It was a part of the etiquette of the country not to ask for any more personal data than the individual was moved to give.

"No use tryin' to catch the skunks!" the foreman said regretfully. "Do you want a ride?"

Wharton could have hugged the fellow. He followed instructions and found footing while he clung to the back of the seat in which his rescuer rode. In the process of turning the machine on the track, his overtaxed muscles had shrieked their resentment; but the ride meant so much to him that he scarcely felt the strain of keeping his place when they rolled through the night toward the camp.

Ed slept like all the seven experts in sleeping incorporate in one man. He was in a car with a lot of snoring fellows; but the hard bunk and the rough blankets felt like heaven. He went into a blissful oblivion with Miss Angel in attendance.

It was late when the foreman roused him. He told Ed that two of the gang were missing, so he had no difficulty in identifying the men who had meant to rob him.

"I want to get a report back and have those scamps pulled if possible. We're short-handed now, of course. Thought

mebbe you'd take the velocipede and go back to Ellsworth—"

"Not for a motor-car!" Ed interrupted, instanter. "I'm goin' west, foot or wheel."

"So're we. But I—"

"Say, I'll shovel snow!" Wharton announced. "Don't know a damn thing about managin' that cayuse of yourn. You better git on; an' let me stay off an' shovel. That critter 'd git her head an' run off with me, sure, pop!"

The foreman recognized the probability of the cow-man's knowing nothing of the track-velocipede, so he accepted the suggestion. An hour later, Wharton was shoveling snow while the foreman leaned on the table beside the telegrapher at Ellsworth.

Ed had seen him set off. He debated the advisability of sending a message by him to be wired to Cogswell & Sterritt. He wanted to get hold of some of his Aunt Margaret's money. He had budded and grown hopes that needed the fructifying richness of cash to bring them to flower.

But he decided against the message. Of course, that individual who was on his trail had wired back to Ellsworth pending his own return. It would simply be putting his head into the lion's mouth to give information as to his whereabouts. And the realization came crashing down upon him that he gave every evidence of running away. The natural assumption is that only the guilty flee.

He flung down his shovel. Since he had started fleeing, it was up to him to keep going.

"Goin' to feed?" a comrade of the gang asked.

"Guess I will. Shoveling snow makes me hungry."

Wharton accepted the suggestion. He filled up well. He had a plan that needed efficient stoking.

When the other men came from the cook-car, he lingered. A few minutes later, he slid around behind the car and made off westward. He had his shovel over his shoulder so that he seemed merely to be moving off with the intention of returning. He went past the point where the siding and the main road met. Then on through the big cut. And as he emerged

from between the white walls he felt the spatter of water on his face.

It was the beginning of a down-pour. Mistress Weather, having painted a marvelous picture on the face of the earth, proceeded to smear and blot it out, getting ready for the masterpiece of spring that she had in mind.

The foreman at Ellsworth station got off his report. Then the instrument began to click a message in.

"Gosh ding! Can you beat it!" the agent exclaimed.

The foreman leaned over as the other wrote out the despatch.

"Wouldn't you think we wuz the Wild West fur sure? Here's a pair of crooks that tries to croak you; and now Morg Martin's got one of hisn!"

For Martin was wiring the agent to have his lawyer get the telegram at Hank Mosher's for his authority and then communicate with the firm that sent it informing them that an impostor would try to claim the fortune.

"Great snakes! He's a first-class, A-1 wild man!" the agent added as more information came over the wire.

Morg said that he was going to get in touch with Sheriff McCue at Poindexter and have him get over to Ellsworth and begin a hunt for a chap who appeared to be guilty of anything from horse-stealing to murder.

The agent rushed from the station. The foreman followed. The grocery was the first place where Lawyer Moseby might be found.

Hank was measuring out beans for a customer when the two entered. He listened to the word from Morg Martin. Moseby had stopped in on his way to his office, but had gone on about ten minutes before.

"Say, I ain't got that there telegram here," he observed in his deliberate fashion. "It's at the house. You ast Mis' Mosher fur it. If that there chap's a vilyun, he's sure some cool!"

The agent left the store to seek the lawyer. Hank put the beans in a sack and rang up the forty-three cents they brought on his cash-register. Then he turned to the foreman.

"Say, wuz it a big chap that put ye wise

to them devils?" Hank asked. "Big, good-looker with black eyes that bored into you ef he wasn't smilin'?"

The foreman nodded.

"He's the gink that Morg's goin' to 'rest ef he ketches him. 'Pears like that's some feat! Kinda tickles me to think 'bout Morg hoppin' that train, thinkin' he'd bagged his rabbit whilst the rabbit was a lopin' 'long on the other side of the track—to the rearwards—an' Morg a goin' on an' on an' on."

"Easy to bag him now; he's h'istin' snow down the track," the foreman observed.

"Wuz, you mean," Hank said laconically.

"What'd you mean—that he'll hike?" the foreman asked.

"He ain't the kind to stand long enough in a spot to melt the snow when he knows some one's gunnin' fur him."

"Seems like you ain't very crazy 'bout gittin' the wristlets on this guy," the foreman observed.

"Ef his murderin' an' his other crimes is like his horse-stealin', looks to me like Morg Martin ought to git himself pinched for libel!"

"S'pose 'tain't much use me gittin' excited 'bout capturin' them two men," the foreman observed.

"Say, you take it from me, you better trot right back to yer snow-plov while the trottin's good. Don't let Morg Martin git you mussed up in his affairs."

"You an' Martin ain't warm friends, are you?"

"Hell—warm!" Hank ejaculated, his false teeth snapping together. "We would have a decent, grocery-buyin', church-goin' town ef he didn't keep it fur a bar fur his punchers an' a cow-stable fur his cattle. He ain't no ornament to no place! He's so all-fired ust to his own way that I'd be glad if he'd lose this here murderer jes' to learn him he ain't the cheese and the rind, too!"

"Hullo, Moseby!"

It surprised Hank to see the young lawyer standing behind the dangling neckties and the three fancy waistcoats that he had spread out on a clothes-line above the counter.

Moseby said nothing. He was Morg

Martin's lawyer. Hank wondered what he thought and then congratulated himself on having unconsciously imparted information which he had, up to the moment, felt that the new lawyer needed, but found no way to serve to him.

"Say, Hank, do I get you when I think you look on Mr. Martin as a destructive power in the growth of our town?" he asked.

"You git me—straight! I'll tell you a few things that 'll illustrate my meanin' ef you'll step into my office," Hank invited.

Moseby and Hank moved back to the little corner partitioned off from the main room. The foreman started back to his crew.

And the agent waded through the snow up to Mrs. Mosher's veranda—the emissary of Morg Martin in the work of setting up between Edward Wharton and all that was worth having, such difficulties as would render him helpless. Branded as a murderer and horse-thief by Morg Martin, prevented from securing his fortune by the same individual, the prospects for a future with Dewilde Capet were about as bright as mud.

The possession of the message itself was the actual first step in Morg's plan to block the man who somehow filled his mind as a positive menace to his success with Dewilde.

CHAPTER XII.

FENCING WITH A RATTLESNAKE.

BUT the telegram was not where the agent could get it; it was in the bosom of Mrs Mosher's gown. And Mrs. Mosher, like the true-blue friend she was, was slowly making her way to Dewilde.

The agent stormed the house. It gave back empty response. He tried the back door. Still no answer.

He trudged back to the grocery. Hank was serving the patrons whose imprisonment within doors had made their wants numerous.

"Say, Hank, where's your wife?" he demanded.

"Home, I guess," Hank answered as he cut off a hunk of bacon.

"I guess she ain't. I've just been there; an' they ain't nothing doin'."

"It's did, then!" Hank observed with confidence in his other half. "What do you want of her?"

"That telegram. We got to stop that man from gittin' money that ain't hisn."

"Whose got to stop him?" Hank asked, pausing in his business activities and giving all his attention to the agent.

"I got this wire from Morg Martin—"

"That telegram we got wasn't addressed to Mr. Morgan Martin. You take it from me, that same Mr. Martin is going to butt in once too many an' git stuck so he cain't git out!"

"Tain't no use encouragin' murderers and cutthroats and horse-thieves in this here community!" the agent affirmed.

"Tain't no sense in lettin' Morg Martin run every prospective, high-class citizen out of the place."

"I don't bite you, Hank. This here murderin' brute ain't no high-class citizen as I can see."

"Ain't nobuddy said he was a murderer and a' impostor but Morg Martin, is they?" Hank asked.

"Not as I know of. But he—"

"But he's got his eyes crossed a-lookin' at Dewildy Capet, an' you know it. This here man he's after just come from visitin' at the Neck-and-Neck. He come in with Miss Dewildy's Switches. I guess she thinks a heap of him to let him have her cayuse. Morg's jes' got jealous and gone to poppin' round with his gun. Ef you'd 'a' lived here's long as we have, you'd be plumb sick of his high-handed ways."

"You ain't a goin' to give me that telegram then?" the agent queried.

"I ain't got it. Mis' Mosher's took charge of it. She's a goin' to show it to Miss Capet. Ef you want it, you kin git it from the company. But let me tell you, you better go easy how you collaborate with a private citizen 'bout houndin' some one. Morg Martin shot at that man when he was gittin' aboard the train. I seen him do it. I hope to the good Lord that Mr. Wharton 'll come back and give him hisn. Meanwhile, they ain't nobuddy but the sheriff's got the right to do what you're

a foolin' with. Till you git your orders from him, don't be makin' a fust-class ijit and catspaw of yerself fur Morg Martin. It don't pay; and it hurts the town!"

The agent went back to his work. Hank's advice sounded sane. The agent had aspirations for local popularity; Hank had waked him up to the fact that the man he considered the "most prominent citizen" was not in favor with the real town-builders and reliables.

When Hank went home for his dinner, he found the table all spread and the food on it. Under the lid of the sugar-bowl he unearthed a note:

HANKY:

The coffee's in the pot on the back of the stove. Fritz put our old buggy on runners and I am off to Dewilde. So-long, Hankey. Don't forget your medicine.

MINNIE.

Hank grinned. Minnie always did the right thing. She had gone off with the telegram, of course, though her motive was to succor Dewilde. He saw in it the kindly hand of a fortune that meant to curb Morg Martin in his abuses of the town and its better citizens.

As Minnie, accompanied by Fritz, plowed westward through the snow in the improvised sleigh, Dewilde reentered the ranch-house after a visit to Switches.

She opened the door softly, hoping that her visitor might be asleep. But she was amazed to see him up and digging away at the bedding on the springs in the bunk.

"What are you doing?" she exclaimed, surprised at the vigor he displayed.

Clayton started.

"Dropped my watch down here," he answered.

Dewilde thought no more of the incident, except to decide that the man was well enough to go on to town as soon as a way was provided.

But the real Arch Clayton had made a discovery. He lay back in the bunk absolutely shivering with suppressed excitement. He had seen, between the springs, a good-sized sheet of galvanized tin. And on it were letters painted in black he knew to be the symbols of the precious formula.

One thing he needed—that was oppor-

tunity to move the spring so that the thin slats which crossed it did not partly hide the precious recipe.

He begged Dewilde not to stay with him.

"Just where do you think I could go?"

"You make it so perfectly apparent that I'm a bother I wanted to relieve you of any feeling of responsibility for me!" he replied. She glanced at him and the silver in her eyes grew bright.

"There isn't much of a variety out here in the way of refuges and retreats and sanitariums! When any one comes along who needs one of the three, the hospitality of the country just has to give of its poor facilities."

"I'm not looking for a sanitarium!" he retorted.

"N-o?" she returned, her brows lifted.

"No! But a retreat suits me all right—with a girl like you!"

Clayton watched the flow of her wrath rise in her cheeks in crimson banners and blaze from her eyes like twin beacons.

"You don't like that!" he observed.

"But you've been treating me to your Vere de Vere manners about as long as I care to stand it. That scoundrel Clayton isn't the only man in the world that likes a pretty girl. You let him get away with some love stuff—"

"Be still!" she cried, leaping from her chair and facing him in royal indignation. "That man may have been short on morals; but he had manners! If you can't remember yours, I'll remind you!"

She started across the room to where her own and Wharton's gun lay on the table. She had put them there on her return from the shack; and, after getting breakfast, had forgotten to replace her weapon in her pocket.

"I guess you won't pick up one of those guns, Miss Capet!"

Clayton, cat-footed in his stocking feet, was within three feet of her. The gun that neither she nor Morg had thought to take from him, was leveled at her.

Dewilde went white, overwhelmed with terror for an instant. The utter hopelessness of any one's coming was the one thought that held her in its grip.

Clayton laughed.

"My dear girl, I'm not the same kind of a villain that you spent the night with. I see how beautiful you are just as plainly as he did. I'd give a good deal to know how he won you; but—"

Dewilde's breath stuck in her throat for a second. Then a wave of something warm and strengthening rose from her heart.

"I'm willing to earn a way to what he just naturally took!"

Dewilde Capet had been brought up like lots of other Southern girls, to think that her charms were the royal road to triumph in men's hearts. Her mother had come as near to spoiling her with the doctrine as she could; it was only the invincible natural nobility of the girl's character that had saved her.

But now, with a gun pointing at her and a man behind it whose eyes glistened disagreeably while he kept moistening his lips as if they were parched, she deliberately focused every phase of her winsomeness as a weapon to match his.

"Have I been so—so disagreeable?" she asked, the long look from under her dark lashes holding Clayton's gaze.

"You have," he asserted, wondering what she meant to try next.

"I reckon you're right," she acknowledged softly, the deeply luscious corners of her lips drooping. "I'm so distracted about my uncle and all that's happened since this hideous storm set in that I—I—I reckon I've been mighty unkind."

Pity for herself and fear made the tears come. They slipped from under her lowered lids and dried, after an instant of trembling on her cheeks.

"I'll accept that as an apology," Clayton said quickly, dazed a bit by the bewildering change in her. Then he added:

"I wonder if you'll ever forgive me for—for daring to give you a hint of how I feel about you!"

"I'd find it easier to do that if you were not at the business end of a gun. Of course, you can make me say—or do—almost anything you like when you have the drop!"

"I don't want to act the cave-man—unless you make me!" he answered.

"Well, I won't. I don't know much about cave-men; and I'm clever enough to

stay within the limits of my own experience.

"Does that mean that you'll let that gun alone?" he asked.

"It does."

He laughed aloud. There was that in her voice, in her eyes as she gave him a fleeting glimpse of them which seemed to say, "You're too big and too strong, too much of a man altogether for me to combat you; I cry quits!"

She moved toward the fire, which needed replenishing. As she bent to pick up a log, Clayton rushed forward.

"Let me do that!" he said, tossing it on the fire.

"Oh, but you are quite strong!" she exclaimed.

Her gray eyes swept him with a glance he could not read. He fell back on his rôle of invalid.

"I'd try anything for you! But it—makes me wobbly," he answered, swaying slightly as he caught hold of the mantel.

Dewilde's eyes said nothing. Her softly closed lips did not move. But deep within a silent voice told her he would leave that ranch-house at the very earliest moment. She hated him as she hated a rattlesnake.

Counting on the gain he believed he had made in her good graces, Clayton paused beside the fire.

"Would you mind if I sat down here?" he asked.

"Of course not. Do!" she responded, her hand itching to feel the pressure of her gun's butt.

"It's certainly some exclusive here," he observed, creeping warily up to a point on which he had thought intently.

"It's the end of the world—when it snows," she responded, feeling like a mouse that a cat had let run for a second.

"Have you any idea when Mr. Martin will come back?"

"Morgan Martin is a peculiarly determined man. He's gone to get the man he believes tried to rob my uncle and kill you. Of course, you are not dead; but he—doesn't know that; and he does know what this—this black-hearted beast did to Mr. Capet!"

For reasons of his own, Clayton made no comment; and Dewilde sat in a miserable reverie. The fire crackled as it bit into the new log. And in the silence of the room, they heard the heavy drops of rain come pelted down on the roof.

Somehow, the foreboding that Martin would find out who was really the fiend that had mistreated Capet ground into Clayton till he was terror-stricken.

"Rain! Rain!" Dewilde exclaimed. "The snow will go. You can get away!"

She ran toward the door. From the corner of her eye, she sent a wishful glance at the two guns lying on the table; but dared not risk an effort to secure them.

"I'll have to look after some things outside!" she called back over her shoulder.

Slipping into her coat she rushed out into the snow, capless. Once beyond the door, her breath stuck in her throat; and a great sob pushed up through it stifflingly. Weary, worried, wretched, she ran to her one comforter.

Switches whinnied softly as she burst into his stable and shut the door behind her. She dropped the latch in place as if even so slight an obstacle between her and the man in the ranch-house were a comfort.

The instant the door slammed behind her, Clayton shot up from his place on the bench. A moment later he heard the sound of another door closing.

Martin might come back. He dared not let another moment pass without making an effort to secure the formula and then seeking a means of getting away from the ranch-house.

He strode to the bunk. With a jerk he pulled the bedding out on the floor. Then lifted the springs so that one side rested on the board that formed the front of the bunk.

He grabbed his pencil and a piece of paper, copied the first symbols of the formula and bent to move the springs so that he could see the rest.

"Well! I never!"

The voice startled him as if it were the crack of doom. He whirled guiltily. Mrs. Mosher, eying him grimly, stood on the threshold.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Local Talent



By Jack Bechdolt

THREE men followed a mountain trail single file. The one who led held his hands stiffly before him and the second man carried an automatic pistol and watched the leader. The third traveler clung to a small, black leather hand-bag.

It had been raining, was raining and promised to keep on raining with the peculiar fidelity that is characteristic of the Cascade range where warm air currents off the Pacific meet the chill of the snow-fields and dissolve into tears.

The trail was merely a crude track through the big timber. It climbed over the roots of trees as high as a small house; crawled under windfalls and lost itself in thickets where vine maple and briars tangled like barbed wire and were no more considerate of the person who ventured through. The soil was so rain-sodden that the men sank to their ankles.

The wrists of the leader, held so stiffly before him, were manacled and his arms were of little use in balancing his body. He lurched like a drunkard on a Saturday night and went often to his knees. From head to boot-sole he was plastered with mud. His clothing was torn by thorns and the exposed parts of his body were scratched and bruised and grimed.

The gray light had failed completely when the leader came in sight of a little cabin of logs and cedar shakes set in a

makeshift clearing and revealed only by the glow of a lamp. He indicated the place by a stiff gesture of the bound arms and halted.

His two companions halted beside him and stared a long time. The man with the weapon, who was heavy set and spoke with evidence of a bad cold in the head, swore huskily. "You trying to double-cross us?" he demanded.

"Yeah!" whined the third traveler. "You said this shack was empty! If you're framing anything—"

"It was empty two days ago," their leader declared. "I tell you I was up to it and it was empty—and closed up. It was! How in hell could I double-cross the two of you—and you with the guns!"

They clustered there at the edge of the clearing and argued angrily. All admitted to being tired—played out with the hard going; half starved and half frozen. The orange glow of the light and errant sparks from the cabin's tin stove-pipe had a fascination for them like the candle's lure for the moth. Finally the man who held the gun announced, "I'll go up, Gus. You watch him and if he makes a squawk—you know! If it's O. K. I'll whistle."

Five minutes later they heard his low signal to them and met him before the cabin door.

He was chuckling. "It's all right, Gus!

Nobody but a skirt, and all alone. Come on in!"

The woman was the only ornamental thing in the cabin. Its walls were logs, chinked with mud and unadorned. A box-like shelf, cushioned with straw and covered with a pair of gray blankets, was built in one corner for a bunk. The small iron stove was rusty, but glowing now with life. The lamp swung from the wall by an iron bracket. In the center of the small room stood a home-made table. Except for these and some men's clothing hanging from nails the place was bare.

But the woman was distinctly an ornament. She was tall as the average tall man, a six-footer and built in proportion—as nice a piece of work as the fabled Juno. The trail clothes she wore—man's overalls stuffed into high boots, a blue flannel shirt and over that, hanging open, a wool sweater of dull wine-brown—accentuated her handsome figure. Her hair was piled thick, the color of straw long exposed to the weather, and her eyes were blue and long-lashed. In a more womanly dress she might have seemed commonplace; as it was she fitted her environment perfectly.

The knock at the door startled her at the stove, where she was tending a frying-pan and coffee-pot, but she answered almost without hesitation with an invitation that held a hearty welcome.

When the three men came in she stared hard at her peculiar guests, but she asked no questions.

"Sit down and dry off," she said, "and one of you boys close that door. Grub's pretty near ready. Been following the trail far?"

The hoarse-voiced one, who had dropped his pistol into the side pocket of his mackinaw coat, answered her. "Yes'm, come a long ways—all the way down from Snoquamish Pass since morning. And a rotten trail that is!"

She nodded affably. "Well, I should say it was, this time of year!" Her eyes turned curiously to the manacled man.

"My name's Holt, lady, John Holt, of Atkins' International Detective Agency. This here's my partner, Gus Kidder." The hoarse-voiced one turned up the lapel of his

coat and showed a nickel badge. "Deputy sheriff in this county." He brought several papers from his pocket and offered them to her. "My credentials, miss. Me and Gus have been up to the Pass after this party here, Wallace Poe. He robbed a bank messenger in Seattle two weeks back. Got bonds mostly, one hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth. He and another guy. We haven't got the other one yet, but we got this bird all right, eh, Poe?" Holt grinned jovially at his prisoner. The prisoner said nothing.

The manacled man's silence seemed to tickle Holt. He explained, "Poe ain't much of a hand for conversation, lady. Just don't seem to feel like talking. I guess maybe he's saving all his talk to spill to the judge and jury!" He laughed heartily at this, and Gus, who was thin and habitually glum, condescended to grin.

The woman surprised the prisoner in a blush. The dirt on his face was crusted too thick to show the hot blood of shame, but by his eyes she knew his emotion.

"Grub's ready," she announced. "Draw up and eat plenty."

She served them ham and eggs and fried potatoes and they wolfed down the hot food. Holt released his prisoner's hands for the meal and promptly returned the manacles when he had finished.

They did no talking until they had eaten, then Holt, expanding under the influence of food and his pipe, put a number of questions about the trail, about the distance to Hydro, the nearest town eight miles away, and finally, "Homesteading here, I s'pose?" he inquired.

The woman nodded, yes.

"Husband gone for long?"

"My husband! Oh, well he's not gone—because he's never been here. I haven't any—not married."

"Is that so! Well, well, single woman, eh?"

"Single woman."

She answered his questions composedly. There was just a hint of amusement at his volubility and his curiosity. She said her name was Carr; that women homesteaders were not so unusual; that she was not at all frightened at the life and too busy with

work to get lonesome; agreed that at times the trails were pretty bad and the living problem knotty, but seemed buoyed up by unflinching optimism and guided by shrewd common sense. She volunteered little, but talked readily enough when Holt and Gus asked questions.

Holt ceased questioning finally and showed evidences of thinking. Finally, "Gus, c'mere a minute," he said. The two went to a far corner of the room and began to argue some question in whispers.

May Carr rose. "This place is getting stuffy," she announced. "If you don't mind I'll open the window a bit."

An absent-minded nod from the two in the corner gave her permission. She pushed the window high.

A gust of wind shook the cabin. The coal-oil lamp flickered sharply, then went out.

May Carr's frightened exclamation was echoed by the shouts of Holt and his partner, a scuffle of feet, an exclamation from the prisoner in tones of evident annoyance, "Me try to break away! Where d'you get that stuff?"

Then the woman's voice: "I'll find a match in just a second now. Sure had a box by this stove when I started supper. Now where in the world—"

"Better make it snappy, lady," Holt suggested grimly. "Don't like this dark—"

From the prisoner: "Hell, I'm not starting anything!"

From Gus: "Who kicked my leg? Ow! Get off my corn, Holt!"

Holt was protesting sharply. "I ain't on your corn, I tell you!" when a match was scratched and they saw May Carr at the lamp. The light glowed again. She closed the window briskly and smiled. "Didn't know it was blowing so," she apologized.

Holt grumbled. "No harm done, I guess," and picked up the black leather bag knocked from the table to floor in the confusion.

Then he turned to their hostess. "Me and Gus was wondering," he said, "if you could keep an eye on our prisoner for us? You see, Poe's partner is liable to be coming down that trail 'most any time, and we

aim to bag 'em both. That's the policy of Atkins's Agency, Miss Carr. Make a clean job of it no matter how much trouble it costs." He grinned genially. "We thought if we tied Poe up good maybe you'd just as lief keep an eye on him for a few hours while we watched the trail? If the other fellow don't show up by morning, why we'll go to Hydro, and telephone for some fresh men for that job. Guess you ain't afraid to stay with this Poe, eh? I'll leave you a gun—"

"I have a gun. And I'm not afraid." May Carr smiled slightly.

"By gosh, and that's no bluff, either!" Holt vowed with real enthusiasm as he surveyed her erect, vigorous figure. "You could lick six of him! Eh, Poe?" He guffawed delightedly.

Gus had produced a length of stout cord and was already making a hobble about Poe's ankles. Holt unfolded a handkerchief and thrust it into his prisoner's mouth.

May Carr protested. "Oh, must you do that?"

"Well, it's this way," Holt's husky voice whispered confidentially; "he's a foul-mouthed, hard-boiled guy, miss, and leave him alone with you this way and he's liable to say something rough—maybe make you uncomfortable, y'see?"

She nodded thoughtfully.

It was perfectly plain, when they had finished, that the prisoner was not going to make anybody any trouble, either vocal or otherwise. He was hobbled by the ankles; his wrists were held securely by steel bracelets and his jaws were spread apart by the gag.

Holt addressed him with his ready grin. "Just take it easy, Poe. Don't excite yourself none. Keep calm whatever you do, and maybe if you're patient we'll come back and get you pretty soon. Ready, Gus?"

"Ready," Gus declared, picking up the black leather bag.

"Good luck, boys," said May Carr. "I hope you find your man."

When they had gone she resumed her seat at the table, studying the prisoner. He sat facing her, his hands held stiffly before him, his face half obliterated by the gag.

His eyes kept moving, asking questions, beseeching, imploring.

Finally she rose briskly.

"That gag's a silly piece of business," she announced. "I declare, I think I'll take it off. Why, I haven't heard a word out of you since you came in. As if I was afraid of anything you'd say!"

With strong, skilled fingers she unknotted the rag from his jaws, then filled a dipper with water and held it to his lips. He gulped the water like a famished dog.

May Carr sat down and studied him with evident self-approval.

"Now you can talk," she said, "but first maybe you'd feel better if you took some of that mud off your face. The wash-basin's in the corner."

When the prisoner had followed this hint he presented a rather florid countenance, not so bad looking. A little trick mustache of the sort that became popular during the war was again visible. One could imagine him, barbered and carefully dressed, as something of a city lady-killer—and the girl's face must have reflected some admiration at the change, for he appeared more complacent.

"Look here, little lady," he began huskily, "thank God you got some brains and a regular human heart. You ain't going to lose by this little piece of work; no, sir! Jack Holt's a regular guy when it comes to remembering his friends—"

"Jack Holt! Why, he—"

"No, he ain't, either. Jack Holt—that's me, see? I'm Jack Holt—Holt, of the Atkins International Detective Agency, Atkins's right-hand operative—"

Her big eyes widened as she stared. Her lips parted. She leaned forward, all attention. The prisoner noted the attitude with evident satisfaction.

"I'm Jack Holt, the detective," he repeated earnestly. "That big stiff with the cold in his head, that's Poe, Poe the guy that got those bonds off the messenger. He's the crook, I tell you; he's the party ought to be wearing these bracelets. Lady, that's God's truth. You—you got to believe me—"

"Oh, oh, I—I couldn't believe that. Why, how—when—why didn't you say this

before? Why didn't you speak when he was here?"

The flush deepened in his face. His voice became sulky. "Held a gun on me," he mumbled. "I'll make him pay for that yet. If I talked he'd have blown my head off. Say—how was I to tell you?"

"But—but he had identification papers, everything—"

"Yeah! Everything of mine! Can't you get that, miss? Listen, you got to get it, and get it quick. I'm on the level. Poe, and this fellow, Kidder, that's his partner in that bond robbery, well, they got my papers and my star and my gun and they're getting away with that bag that's got all the bonds in it. They're going to get clean away if I can't get your help to-night. You got to believe me, little girl, you got to understand somehow—"

"But I don't understand, yet—" Her look invited him to tell it all.

Again the flush deepened in his face. He had something to tell that he did not relish. But also he was plainly desperate.

"I was out of luck," he explained. "Out of luck, that's all. First time Jack Holt ever got in a jam like this, but—well, hell, when I get fooled you can bet it's some pretty clever crook turns the trick. And I'll hand it to Poe, he's a smart one—and a bad one, too! Why, lady, it's the first time—never mind, though. Y'see, I went after this pair alone. That's the kind of worker I am, Miss Carr—always taking a big chance in the line of duty. I went after 'em single-handed. The city police and the rest of the Atkins force—good fellows y'understand, but not very quick in the head—well, they all figured this pair would try to work south along the coast. But not Jack Holt. No, sir, I sized up this case different. I figured they'd sure try to strike across the Snoquamish Pass toward the east—and that's just what they did—"

May Carr's eyes were bright. She glowed with admiration. "My, that was clever! How do you detectives ever guess those things?"

"Oh, well—" Even manacles could not spoil the prisoner's improved opinion of himself when that opinion was so plainly reflected by the pretty girl opposite. "Us

detectives is trained to use our beans," he admitted.

"I should think so! And nobody helped you, nobody gave you any tip which way they might go?"

"Give me a tip! Huh! No, nobody gave me any tip. Why?"

"Oh, I just read somewhere that detectives work that way—"

"Not Jack Holt, lady!"

"And I thought I heard Ed Mears, the deputy sheriff at Hydro, say something about working with one of Atkins's men on the bond theft case—"

"Never heard of this here Mears," the prisoner declared, looking her squarely in the eye. "Never heard of him!" he added generously. "Not but maybe your friend Ed Mears is all right, y'understand, but us regular detectives don't get any help out of those hick constables and deputy sheriffs. I work alone—"

"You seem to have found your men all right," she suggested demurely.

"Y-e-e-s—Yeah, I found 'em. I found 'em." Holt, if it was Holt, wriggled uneasily. "Fact is," he added, "they found me! Found me and got the drop on me. Used my own bracelets on me, too. And made me show 'em the trail out to Hydro. Treated me like I was a pack-horse—"

"Good gracious, they might have murdered you!"

"Planned to. Yep, they figured on that, when we got close enough to Hydro so's they'd be sure of the way. Lucky we saw your light-here. And now, they've beat it. First thing they'll do is divide up those bonds and split up. Go two ways and make twice as much trouble running 'em down."

He leaned forward earnestly, beating his manacled hands on the table.

"Miss Carr, don't you believe in me now? Hey, don't you? Why, you got to believe me! Won't you please take me to Hydro, where I can get these damned cuffs cut off my wrists and get on the trail of those guys again? Can't you see how I've got to hurry? Why, every minute counts—"

"Yes, you really ought to hurry," May Carr agreed. "That is, if you really are Jack Holt, the great detective—"

"But I am. I am Holt! Can't you see I'm the real thing? Don't I talk like it—act like it?"

A trace of smile disturbed May Carr's lips. "I believe you do," she agreed with cordiality. "Yes, I believe you do—you act just like one of Atkins's famous detectives!"

Was there any irony concealed in that remark? Holt did not seem to think so. He burst out gratefully. "I thought you'd understand! Thank God, I struck somebody with brains! Why, you—Miss Carr, you're darn clever—for a woman. A clever, smart girl like you is bound to tell a real detective from a phoney. Now you'll take me to Hydro, eh?"

"I might, if—"

"Please, please, lady! You don't want them crooks to get away—"

Her manner changed swiftly. Her up-raised hand cut his speech in twain. In a low tone she said, leaning closer: "Be still. They're coming back. You do as I tell you—never mind how I know; I do know! Take this flashlight. You can manage that with the bracelets on?"

She thrust an electric torch into his hands, then crossed the room and blew out the lamp.

"In a couple of minutes Poe and Kidder will come in here," she whispered. "Don't talk! Don't doubt me! I know it's they because—because I do know. Now! When they push open that door you turn that light on them and keep it on them. Keep it in their eyes. I've got a gun and I know how to use it. I'll attend to them and you attend to the light—"

"Don't I get a gun?"

"You! Think I'd trust you with a gun—and your hands manacled besides. Mind that light. Ready!"

Events proved swiftly that May Carr had a sharp ear and some faculty as keen as second sight. The outer door was pushed open with stealthy caution. Two figures, bulking dimly against the faint gray light, blocked the opening.

The electric torch flashed in their faces. Poe and Kidder, as the girl had said!

On its first rays sped May Carr's command: "Stick 'em way up, both of you.

Higher! I'm awful nervous with a gun. Now, come into the center of the room."

They came, followed by the rays of the torch. Her deft hands robbed them of their firearms. She stored the extra weapons in her sweater-pockets.

Then she addressed Holt sharply, relieving him of the light as she spoke. "Up with you, alongside your friends. All three of you back up against that wall."

"Hey, listen!"

She gestured unpleasantly with the pistol. Holt rose and backed slowly toward Poe and Kidder, his manacled hands held above his head.

The three of them lined up, facing her, pinned to the wall by the stabbing light and the menace of her weapon. May Carr backed swiftly toward the open door. From the doorway she spoke again.

"If any of you huskies think you can wriggle through that tiny window you're welcome to try, after I'm gone. I don't think you can do it. And this door is going to be barred from outside, so I guess that'll hold you until I bring up some of the boys from Hydro. Take my advice and you won't try to get loose. It's a long trail back to Snoquamish Pass and you're bound to get caught one side or the other. Good-by."

"Wait!" Poe's husky voice quivered reproachfully. "Somebody swiped them bonds out of our bag. Gus claims it was you. I ain't sure, but if it wasn't you, me and Gus have got a little settlement to make to-night—"

"It was you! It was; wasn't it, lady?" Gus entreated.

"Yes," said May Carr. "I took them when the light blew out. I have them with me. I took them because I hoped you and Gus would come back looking for them."

Poe muttered something eloquent of bitterness. May Carr took another backward step.

"Yeah, how about me, lady?"

The detective's hands stretched out entreatingly.

"Listen, you ain't going to leave me here to be murdered?"

"I don't think your friends will murder

you. Not really. Because a posse will be back for them in a little while—and that would mean swinging for them. Of course they might feel a little sore—"

"But I tell you I'm Jack Holt, of the Atkins Agency. I thought you said you believed me—"

"I'm inclined to believe you. Sometimes I think you are just what you say—"

"Well then, for God's sake—"

Her voice was cool—brisk. "And if you really are Holt—"

"I am. You must know I am—"

"Well, if you are Jack Holt, you're getting just what you deserve. Let me remind you: Ed Mears, deputy sheriff at Hydro, has been flat on his back with a fever. Too weak to stir out. But it was Ed Mears who figured out why and how Poe and Kidder would come over Snoquamish Pass. He figured it all out and sent for Jack Holt, of the Atkins Agency, and they made a bargain to go halves on the reward. But Jack Holt being a *really great* detective couldn't see it that way. He wouldn't wait for the man Mears wanted to send to help him. No. He decided to do the job alone—and take all the reward. No help from hick constables for Jack Holt. He's a man who can use his own brains!"

She chuckled grimly. Then she added: "But maybe you're not Holt after all. How can I tell? I'll just leave you with your friends until Ed Mears has a look at you."

"You framed this! You figured all this out!"

"Remember, even you said I was smart—for a woman! I knew about you—and the way you double-crossed Mears. I came looking for you."

"But—but, lady, who the hell are you?"

She laughed contentedly. "Nobody. No detective at all, Holt. I'm only the girl that's going to marry Ed Mears the day we cash those rewards."

She was still chuckling when the door was barred and she was free to turn down the trail to Hydro. But there were no chuckles in the cabin where two sorely tried crooks were considering what to do to the hapless Jack Holt.

The Tempting Tangle

by Victor Lauriston

Author of "Pay Sand," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS.

MRS. FERINTOSH had come down by the time Detective Tripp and Captain Grant returned from their fruitless chase. Robinson still seemed dazed and unsteady. To Tripp he tried to explain again just what had happened to him.

"I watched, sir. Just watched in the dark, sir. Then up came some one behind me, very quiet, and grabbed me. Then I went dizzy, all of a sudden. The next I knew I was hanging on to the post, and Miss Adair had switched on the light."

"What I want to know," insisted Tripp, "is, what did the man look like?"

Robinson puzzled. He was apparently trying to resolve his recollections into the real and the fanciful; and they were too badly mixed to do this in a moment.

"I'd say he was a tall man, sir; and dark. I'd say a foreigner, sir. He moved very quiet, just like a cat."

"Or an Indian?" interpolated Glory Adair softly.

She saw Tripp start at that suggestion. They were grouped around the sitting-room table. Behind their heavy lashes Glory Adair's brown eyes glowed with sheer devilment. She had made that suggestion on the spur of the moment, for Tripp's sole benefit.

There were few Indians to be seen in

Carisford in these modern days. Then she remembered that at Moraviantown, close to the Bothwell oil wells, there was an Indian reserve.

"I don't know as to that, miss," returned Robinson, a bit confused but still very respectful. "It was too dark to tell much, and he must have been behind me. But I'd say a foreigner, anyway."

That was about all he could say, though Tripp questioned him pertinaciously. Nor had Captain Grant much to add. Grant had seen a vague shape flitting through the shrubbery, and had at once shouted to Tripp.

As for Tripp, he had blundered into a lawn seat and barked his shins, and had not got near enough to the fugitive to see anything. But he seemed eminently satisfied. He said good-night to Mrs. Ferintosh and nodded amicably to Glory Adair.

She surmised that the little man wished to talk; so walked sedately with him as far as the tall iron gate.

"Well?" said Tripp.

He stopped in the path and looked squarely into her brown-eyes. It was too dark to see much, but his manner was unmistakably cocky.

"Miss Adair," he said, "I've been letting you run away with my common sense. You're an uncommonly persuasive young woman. It's just as well this thing happened. It has brought me down to earth."

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for March 26.

"Indeed?" The nurse's tone was dryly sarcastic. But Tripp, in his self-congratulatory mood, quite missed the sarcasm.

"There's nothing to your palmistry—nothing. *Absolutely* nothing. I'll say it again, Miss Adair—nothing." He seemed eager to convince himself, and to drive home the conviction so deeply that no smile of hers should ever again lure him away from his solid skepticism.

"Nothing," agreed Miss Adair equably. "Of course there's nothing. *You* surely thought so when you went digging into the Bothwell epoch and unearthed Peter Cassilis?"

"Cassil," corrected Tripp. "I knew all along I was wasting time there. Still, your line of talk has been so uncommonly persuasive, I just felt I had to look up those things. Now I'm going to remind myself every morning that this is just a plain, matter-of-fact case involving blackmail and kidnaping and murder. That I must keep my bearings. And that I have merely to stick to the present to unearth all the facts I need. I don't need to dig into the remote."

"Then don't do it."

She had diagnosed Tripp long ago. He was an alert, energetic, busy little man with an amazing memory for evidence, but with a recurrent yearning to confide his views to some one. His note of egotistical self-satisfaction jarred her.

She had a profound faith in her palmistry, and her palmistry had told her just two things—that Ferintosh was no killer, and hence could not have murdered Creighton; and that Ferintosh had done nothing since his marriage to subject him to blackmail. Postscript: Ferintosh would fight back rather than pay blackmail, unless he had some powerful, unselfish motive for covering up the truth. That truth, she insisted, related to occurrences far distant; and Tripp, she told herself, must go a long way back to find the truth.

But Tripp no longer thought so.

"The case is perfectly obvious," insisted Tripp. "Ferintosh vanishes from the house at night. Nobody sees him at the railroad stations or on the streets. Hence, he must have been kidnaped by some one,

taken away in a closed car, and driven across country. Either that, or he is hidden in Carisford. I am working on that theory now. What I've discovered is, of course, my own secret."

"Naturally."

There was tacit defiance in Glory's tone. She added a careless question as, having bade the little man good night, she turned away from the gate.

"Did you test that slip of paper for finger-prints?"

"I'm not telling," said Tripp.

"I surmise," returned Miss Adair, "you found none. You see, the hand that placed that message on the porch was *gloved*."

"How do you know?"

Tripp checked himself.

"Seeing you know so much," he added.

"Because," she said, "if you had found any telltale finger-prints on that paper, you'd have wished to consult my hand-print collection for purposes of comparison. That's how I know the hand was gloved. You're not so clever as I imagined, Mr. Tripp."

Tripp was too peeved to speak.

"Gloves in mid-July," pursued Miss Adair, "indicate one of two circumstances. Either this individual who left the message tacked to the post is a criminal shrewd enough to guard against detection by means of his finger-prints, or—he is a man accustomed to wear gloves on nearly all occasions. Hence, not a poor foreigner, trudging the streets of Carisford, but a gentleman used to riding in his own car."

"I see what you're driving at," pursued Tripp. He was palpably excited, despite his efforts to retain composure. "*The man was Ferintosh himself*. He is keeping under cover, and is hard up, and—this is his only way to raise money. Pretty far-fetched, though!" he snorted, on guard against her insidious wiles.

"I shouldn't talk to you, anyway," he added abruptly. "You're too clever. First thing I know, I'll be telling you everything I've discovered."

"You might as well," she retorted placidly. "It'll take you just a minute. Oh, since you insist, Mr. Tripp, good night, and pleasant dreams!"

He was, she mused, very human, and seemingly a little huffed at her line of talk.

That Ferintosh was the man who posted the message really had never occurred to her till Tripp made the suggestion. She had merely baited him, and he had nibbled, as she intended. But, if Ferintosh was using this curious ruse to secure funds he needed, was Robinson in league with him?

She studied Robinson, mentally, as she lay awake in her room. The man was palpably devoted to Ferintosh. His hand bespoke intense loyalty to any one he loved—a loyalty calculated to drive him to extremes. Yes, a loyalty that might even impel him to reluctant crime. For by nature the man was upright and honest; that much his hand had told her.

The thing had a touch of plausibility, after all. Ferintosh might have found it necessary to keep himself *perdu*; he might have approached Robinson in secret for money. Robinson might have found it difficult to raise funds in any large amount himself. But the blackmailing message made it easy enough.

If that theory was correct, then, as Tripp had surmised, Ferintosh was still in Carisford; perhaps—she shivered—hidden in Ferintosh House itself.

At that she rose and turned on her light. Somehow there was something grisly in the suggestion, that shook even her nerves. The comfortable glow reassured her, however.

If Ferintosh was here, and hidden, she meant to discover the fact as soon as it was daylight. Moreover, she meant to discover it without any help from Tripp.

But—her thoughts took another sharp turn—how did this supposition dovetail into the main crime—the murder of Creighton? The disappearance of Ferintosh and the subsequent murder of Creighton were on the surface apparently related events. Whoever was responsible for the disappearance of Ferintosh was—so Tripp had argued—responsible also for the murder. That had been Tripp's supposition all along.

But if Ferintosh had vanished of his own volition, and, under cover of the dark, was free to come and go—what, then, became of

the murder mystery? Had Creighton, as the coroner had so blindly adjudicated, really killed himself?

That was the only remaining solution. For every other individual in Ferintosh House had either a clear-cut alibi, or a palpable lack of motive; and Ferintosh—so Glory Adair still insisted, from her reading of his hand, was assuredly no killer.

Early next morning the nurse exhaustively questioned Robinson. But Robinson, under the closest questioning, had nothing to add to his story of the night before.

She felt inclined to believe him. His hand told her his instincts were honest. He would do wrong very reluctantly, and then only under the stress of a passionate devotion to some one dear to him.

"Miss Adair," he burst forth at last, interrupting her questioning, "can't we do something—anything—to find Mr. Ferintosh?"

She shot back a direct challenge.

"You know where he is?"

Robinson shook his head tragically.

"I do not know that, miss."

She searched his shrewd old eyes. He told the truth—of that she was now convinced. He knew no more than did Tripp or she herself as to where Malcolm Ferintosh might be.

With that, so far as she was concerned, Tripp's chance theory that Ferintosh might be implicated in this latest demand for money went glimmering.

Nevertheless, in company with Ruth Ferintosh, she searched Ferintosh House from cellar to attic, poking into closets and disused, musty rooms. The search proved fruitless. Ruth Ferintosh was mystified; but Glory Adair was satisfied.

"What did you expect to find?" the girl asked, her eyes wide.

"I did not expect to find anything," returned the nurse categorically. "And that is precisely what I found."

Two days later, however, the unexpected happened with its customary suddenness. She had quite forgotten her "personal" advertisements in the Detroit and Toronto papers, inserted just after her return from Bothwell.

On the morning mail she received two

letters, forwarded from the Toronto paper. Two letters! She smiled dryly as she recalled what a flood of correspondence and what a deluge of false clues had come to Tripp in reply to his flaring advertisements for Malcolm Ferintosh.

One of the letters was quite bulky. She opened it and smiled. It was a characteristic rambling, discursive communication from J. J. Ellicott, of Bothwell, detailing to the unknown advertiser pretty much what he had told Glory Adair herself regarding the unlucky Tom Fagg.

Evidently, she mused, her inquiries had contributed to refresh the old oil man's recollections on this particular topic.

The other letter was hopelessly thin and flat, and bore a Toronto postmark. It was dated three days before, having, of course, been sent in care of the newspaper office. It read:

I can perhaps give you some information regarding Tom Fagg. I am going to London on the 23rd of July, and will be there a few days; you might write me there care of the — Hotel.

That was all, except the signature, in a firm, well-rounded chirography:

PETER CASSILIS.

Glory Adair laid the letter on her dresser.

This was the 24th of July. Peter Cassilis was now at London—and Tripp did not know.

She found an old newspaper, and consulted its railroad schedule. The east-bound morning train on the one route was leaving in a couple of minutes. On the other route a train left in twenty minutes.

She went to the telephone down-stairs, and called a taxicab.

Then she ran up-stairs to get ready for her hurried trip. She had urged the taxi-driver to call for her early. She was a cautious young lady in some respects; she liked a five or ten minute margin when it came to catching a train.

So she brushed up, put on a newly laundered waist and her best skirt, and spent an extra minute or two on her hair. She admired the effect, then donned her hat.

Just then the taxi-driver honked for her at the gate. She ran to the open window and waved her hand in recognition. Then she ran down-stairs once more, out the front door, and down the porch steps.

As she did so, the unexpected happened again, for the second time in half an hour. The closed taxi, without waiting for her, went speeding down the avenue toward the distant station.

Glory Adair wasted just half a second staring after it; then ran again to the telephone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RUTH INTERVENES.

RUTH FERINTOSH, in her room, was dressing for the street when the postman came. She heard Glory Adair hurry up to her room with the letters, and in a few moments heard her hurry down again to the telephone. That is, she heard Glory Adair hurrying without knowing the reason for her haste; but she surmised it was important, for the nurse was not a hurried sort of person.

She opened her door. Then she crossed the hall, and, being a wicked little thing in her innocent way, she opened Glory's door. There was the letter Glory had just received lying upon Glory's dresser. In her tacit revolt against the things that were, there was just one course for Ruth Ferintosh to take.

She read the letter.

Peter Cassilis! At that she opened her eyes, and her mind worked rapidly. Peter Cassilis, now at London—Glory Adair leaving, presumably on the next train, to meet Peter Cassilis and to discuss this Tom Fagg.

Ruth Ferintosh pocketed the letter. Such a thing was incomprehensible in a girl of her strict upbringing; but it was just the thing she did, on the sheer impulse of the moment.

Next minute she was in her room; and a couple of minutes later Glory Adair was in her room, with the door closed. Noting which, down-stairs went Ruth, very quietly, and all dressed for the street.

Her first impulse was to appeal to some one else for help and guidance. Then she realized that her mother would reprove her, that she could not appeal to Glory Adair, and that she did not want to summon Tripp—and Captain Grant was, apparently, not within call.

She used the telephone then. There was a train eastbound leaving at once. Perhaps it had left. Glory Adair was evidently calculating to take the train on the other line, some twenty minutes later, and—here came a taxicab, honking at the curb.

She telephoned. The earlier of the two trains was ten minutes late. She could make it. She ran briskly down the winding walk, and got into the taxicab, calling her directions to the chauffeur.

"But," protested the chauffeur, "I was to meet the other train."

"Hurry, I tell you." Thus imperious Ruth made a quick getaway, unconscious of Glory Adair's amazement.

She had time, in the two hours' train ride, for a good deal of thought upon the foolish venture she had undertaken: "Why did I do it?" she asked herself. And answered in a moment: "Because you are you, Ruth Ferintosh. Because you have always done whatever you wanted to do, and bought whatever your fancy demanded, on the impulse of the moment. Because you take life for granted—that is why. And that," she told herself, "is why you have not worried over your father's absence. You take him, too, for granted. He has always come back. He always will." Her thoughts reproached her, thus.

She saw a field of three-pole derricks as the train whirled toward Bothwell. They were gone before she knew them for derricks at all. Glory Adair had asked her questions about Bothwell, and had told her something of her father in the Bothwell days, and of this man Tom Fagg, and of gipsies. As she stared across the country she could see in ghostly memory the gypsy van coming up that road of twenty-five years ago. Back there somewhere among the trees the boy Peter Cassil—or Cassilis—had found the charred and blood-stained relics of luckless Tom Fagg.

The hotel mentioned in the letter from

Cassilis stood within a stone's throw, almost, of the London railroad terminal. Here, Ruth felt more at home. She was accustomed to travel; and knew how to impress an obsequious hotel clerk with a fine air of ladylike hauteur.

Yet she had a touch of misgiving when she heard the boy in buttons paging "Mr. Cassilis! Mr. Cassilis!" in his droning voice; and she shivered when a tall man rose from a settee at the farther end of the big lounging room and beckoned the youngster.

He had seemed tall, rather, at first glance; but, confronting her, he was just of middle height. Straight as an arrow, though. He smiled and held out his hand. She took it mechanically. She was fairly frightened now, but hid the fact very well. The man, she reflected, had nice, brown eyes. He was sun-tanned and brown and—yes, very straight.

Afterward she could recall no word she said; but she found and handed him his letter—the letter she had taken from Miss Adair's dresser.

He looked at her again.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I got your telegram. You are Miss Adair, of course?"

She grew red and white by turns. Here, indeed, was a pretty pickle.

CHAPTER XIX.

PALMS DOWN.

IT was a moment or more before Ruth's nerves steadied themselves. Glory Adair would not be here for hours now, having missed her train. By that time Ruth Ferintosh would be on her way back to Carisford. She could rely on Glory's nimble brain to save the situation, when it came to a show-down.

Still, she made no answer to the man's last question. Luckily, he overlooked the omission.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "we could talk better at lunch. You will of course do me the honor to—"

She accepted his invitation. Her color came and went very prettily. A few minutes later she was seated opposite him at

a little table in a sequestered corner of the grill-room. She was mortally curious to learn what this man had to tell of Tom Fagg; but she was also too well-bred to press the question at once. So the talk at first ran to non-essentials—the grill-room, London, the waiters, the weather. That gave Ruth a chance to collect her thoughts, and to try to analyze her companion, as she knew Glory Adair would have done.

He looked younger than he was.

"I'm thirty-three," he said abruptly. "Mining engineer, but have not been working at it. Had a more important rush job in France the last few years."

"Oh!" she breathed. So this man, too, was a soldier—and she wondered what Captain Grant would say if he could see her here.

"I was out West," pursued Cassilis. He was engagingly frank. "Making good money, too—and then along came the war. Well, of course, there wasn't anything to it."

She smiled approvingly. She wished he wasn't in civies; then she would have known whether he was captain or lieutenant. As it was, she had to ask him, point-blank, what rank he held.

"Private," said Cassilis. "Oh," he added, "they made me a sergeant at last, but I signed up as a private."

She was disappointed. "But you should not have done that," she exclaimed. "A professional man with a good income and a—standing in the world—to enlist as a mere private!"

Cassilis gazed at her very hard.

"Lots of better men did it," he said dryly.

She flushed at the tacit reproof and fixed her gaze on the consommé. There was an embarrassed silence. She looked up at last. He was smiling at her.

His smile brought back her equanimity.

"Did you meet Captain Grant over there?" she asked.

He laid down his spoon to look at her the better.

"Captain Ken Grant?"

She nodded.

"Yes."

"He's visiting us now," she explained.

"At Carisford. My mother—I mean—" She checked herself. She had almost betrayed her real identity. She reminded herself, just in time, that this man knew her as Glory Adair.

Again there fell an embarrassed silence. She felt rather than saw that Cassilis regarded her with a sort of fixed stare.

"Ken Grant!" he repeated.

"Captain Kenric Chisholm Grant, of the Eighteenth," said Ruth proudly.

Cassilis seemed to relax.

"Well," he said carelessly, "that's not a name to forget in a moment. It's easier to remember than Tom Fagg, for instance." He smiled. Of his own accord he had brought the conversation to the topic which he evidently felt must be uppermost in his visitor's mind.

"Tom Fagg," she repeated.

And then she fell silent, very white and mutely embarrassed. For a dozen paces away, and approaching her with her steady, relentless nurse's tread, was Glory Adair herself.

Cassilis apparently failed to note his companion's embarrassment. He gave the newcomer a casual glance. Then he regarded her a second time. He turned to Ruth.

"Do you know her?" he inquired in a swift aside.

"Do you?" countered Ruth desperately.

The man's fine forehead wrinkled.

"I can't place her," he said in a low tone. "But I'll swear I've seen her before. There's something vaguely familiar—"

The waiter came just then with the second course. Glory Adair, halting close to the table, turned and seemed to see Ruth Ferintosh for the first time.

She smiled.

"Miss Adair!" exclaimed the nurse.

"Miss Ferintosh!" exclaimed Ruth, catching her clue.

Then she glanced at Cassilis, who had risen.

"You will join us, Miss Ferintosh," he urged.

Ruth flushed again with embarrassment, as the fictitious Miss Ferintosh sat down, with a courteous, composed bow of acknowledgment and a word of thanks to Cassilis.

But, perforce, she had to complete the introduction.

Cassilis nodded to the waiter.

"We were just discussing Tom Fagg," said Ruth, by way of explanation.

"Did Mr. Cassilis remember him at all?" Glory Adair was all interest in a moment.

"You see, Mr. Cassilis," explained Ruth, "we are both interested in this Mr. Fagg, my friend and I." Somehow she could not bring herself to say "Miss Ferintosh."

But Cassilis himself was plainly embarrassed.

"I'm sorry to have brought you this far for almost nothing," he said. "When I read that advertisement, by the merest chance, I felt I'd never met the man. Yet there was something vaguely reminiscent in the name. For a while, though, I was hard put to place him. Did you know him?" he challenged, his eyes on Ruth.

Ruth shook her head.

"I never met the man," said Glory Adair truthfully.

"For a while," went on Cassilis, "I could not remember where he came in. Yet I couldn't get rid of the idea that I'd seen the name somewhere. I could see myself as a boy, standing in the road, reading it in big letters on some sort of sign-board—then I placed it, right enough."

Miss Adair nodded encouragingly. She was taking the lead; for which Ruth was eminently grateful.

"Twenty-five years ago," said Cassilis. "In this part of Canada—on a big, covered wagon."

"A gipsy van?" flashed Miss Adair.

Cassilis's dark face flushed. He gazed at Ruth Ferintosh—the real Ruth Ferintosh.

"As a matter of fact," he said bravely, "I was doing the gipsying. I was a very small boy then, and my father and mother went about the country with a caravan. They were what you'd call gipsies, I suppose—English gipsies, originally from Holmbury, I believe. We did some petty trading, and told fortunes, and, as there was a lot of oil-well drilling in the Petrolia country just then, my mother posed as a clairvoyant and located wells. Oh, I am

not apologizing," he added stiffly. "At least, Miss Adair"—and he fixed his eyes on embarrassed Ruth—"I'm trying to be honest about these things when really I don't have to be."

Ruth Ferintosh cut in swiftly, before Glory Adair could speak.

"I see nothing—wrong in any of that," she flashed impetuously. "And if it were wrong, would the fault be yours?"

The man's dark eyes thanked her for her impetuous defense. Glory Adair frowned.

"So," pursued Cassilis, "we drifted down to a little place called Bothwell, when oil was struck there. It was when we were camped close to a road through the bush, southwest of Bothwell, I think, that I saw Tom Fagg and his wagon go by. The name was painted on the wooden sides in big letters—like this."

He drew an envelope from his pocket, and with a pencil—after a moment's hesitation—traced the letters:

TOM FAGG

PHOTOGRAPHER

"I remember," he interpolated, "that the one 'r' did not seem just what it should be. I was a youngster, but my mother had taught me a great deal. She was a well-educated woman." He was on the defensive again; somehow, with these women opposite him at table, he seemed instinctively called upon to defend these facts he refused to hide.

Ruth Ferintosh saw that Glory Adair was puzzled.

"That 'r,' you see," added Cassilis with a smile, "was what a printer would call 'wrong font.' Well, I don't know who made the first move or gave the first hail; but the next thing I remember, the photograph car was halted at the roadside, the horse nibbling the rank grass, and Tom Fagg lying on his back close to our caravan, smoking, and talking to my father and mother.

"We had our wagon in the woods, but close to the road, and it seems to me he leaned against a tree—but perhaps that was later. Anyway, he dropped his pipe by and by, and gave my mother some money, and held out his hands, and she told his fortune. My father had handed down

a little bench from the wagon, and she sat on it, and Fagg sat with his back against the big tree. My father had gone about his work, splitting wood for the fire; but I stood by, trying to make out what it all meant."

He paused.

"This Fagg was a young man," added Cassilis. "He laughed often during the fortune-telling, and said he believed none of it. It was nonsense—so he told my mother repeatedly; but she just went on in that singsong monotone she used. I remember she told him—"

Cassilis paused again; he glanced up shamefacedly at last.

"I must have spoken before I thought," he said awkwardly. "I really don't remember. It's a great many years ago. I must have been seven or eight years old." He paused, for the waiter had come with the dessert. He was silent for some moments, while the meal went on.

"I can see them, though"—he half closed his eyes—"just as if it were yesterday—my mother with her red shawl over her head and that intent look of hers, and Tom Fagg laughing at her and stroking his beard. It seems, too, that my father had finished chopping the wood and came and stood in the background, frowning, and tugging at a sort of red scarf he wore around his neck. But as to what my mother told Fagg—"

He paused a long moment.

"Yes, I do remember in a hazy way. She told him there were strange things coming to him. He must beware of water. She said something of a door opening—I could not understand that. Fagg laughed and made some objection; and then she said—I remember this very clearly from what happened afterward—"

Cassilis paused again.

"At the next town where you stop you will sell your horse and your car."

Glory Adair felt a queer sinking of the heart, somehow. She had rather come to like Cassilis.

"I remember that," said Cassilis, "because I had been looking at Fagg's horse. It was a fine animal. I always loved a horse, and Fagg seemed to love his. 'I

wouldn't sell old Ben,' he told my mother. 'But you will,' she said as positively as though she knew. 'Then you will travel this road on foot, in the dark—'"

Ruth Ferintosh, knowing vaguely the story of Tom Fagg as Glory Adair had already narrated it to her, trembled, and regarded Cassilis with wide, tragic eyes. Cassilis, though, never seemed to suspect the real significance of what he said.

"Just a minute," interpolated Glory Adair crisply. She was, Ruth knew, less concerned with Tom Fagg than with Malcolm Ferintosh; in the back of her mind was always the waiting question: "What connection had Mme. Rose Cassilis with the location of the Ferintosh gusher?" Toward that question, Ruth suspected, the nurse was deliberately edging her way through all this confused maze of narrative regarding inconsequential Tom Fagg. And that the narrative disclosed the real truth of the Fagg murder was merely an incident, as Glory saw it.

At her words Cassilis paused, expectant.

"When Fagg paid your mother, how did he do it?"

Cassilis answered without hesitation:

"He pulled out a wallet. It was stuffed with bills. I had never seen so much money."

The inference was cruelly plain, even to Ruth. Here was the seductive display of ready money before the avid eyes of the gypsies—and the woman's shrewd suggestion that Fagg sell his car was merely skillful plotting to increase the rewards of her anticipated crime.

Then, at last, Fagg had returned to his car and driven on to Bothwell. There was nothing more that Cassilis remembered of him.

"Except," he said, "one day afterward I thought I saw him in the bush. Afterward, I heard a gun go off. I was frightened, but I did not see Fagg again. But a good many days afterward I stumbled on some old clothes under a brush pile in the woods.

"I pulled them out. They had been partly burned and had dark spots on them. The man, Fagg, had worn clothes just like that when my mother told his fortune.

"I told my mother about the clothes. 'Don't say anything,' she warned me. 'Talk just makes trouble.' She told my father, and it seems to me that he went to look at our horses. I must have spoken about it, though, to some of the bigger boys with the caravan, for next day when we were about to leave the police came and took us all to Bothwell.

"I could not understand what it was all about, except that Tom Fagg was missing, and my father and mother were very much troubled. By and by they let us go; and we went away from Bothwell."

He took up his coffee, and put it down again, untasted.

"I had forgotten, long ago," he said. "But that's all I know of Tom Fagg."

"They wrongfully suspected your parents of having made away with the man?" Glory suggested.

Cassilis stared hard at the tablecloth.

"Of course, that would be it," he said.

"But I couldn't understand then. You know," he added with a touch of bitterness, "whatever happens, the gipsy is *always* guilty."

Glory Adair, with well-feigned carelessness, took up the questioning.

"I suppose your mother told a good many fortunes at Bothwell?" she suggested.

Cassilis flushed slightly under his tan; this theme was plainly unpleasant to him.

"I do not remember," he said a bit shortly.

"She located some wells—"

"I suppose so."

"Including one for Malcolm Ferintosh?"

"I do not remember that."

Glory's eyes seemed to search his face. She shook her head slightly.

"Ferintosh," she said, "was an Englishman—or rather, I think, a Lowland Scotchman. He was supposed to represent an English syndicate. Later he was partner with an oil man named Creighton."

But this and other efforts to stimulate the man's memory failed.

"A tall man," she said, "with a mustache, perhaps. Very straight. Dressed like an Englishman."

Cassilis started.

"In grays—a Norfolk suit?" he demanded quickly.

Here he had Glory Adair at a disadvantage. How could she know what Ferintosh had worn when he came to Bothwell?

"I remember a man like that," pursued Cassilis. "I saw him one day hunting in the woods."

"Did he come to your camp, or consult with your mother?"

"No." Cassilis shook his head. "At least, I never saw him there." Then, with a smile: "We're through? No—this is my check, you remember."

He spoke largely to the waiter, like a man of substance. Glory Adair regarded him again questioningly.

They rose and passed into the lounging-room.

"Perhaps," suggested the nurse, "your mother could—"

"My mother is dead," said Cassilis quietly. "And my father. They both died when I was still a boy. Ever since, I have been on my own—"

Their lingering talk drifted into the inconsequential. Ruth Ferintosh knew that Glory Adair had failed in her quest—and she, with her own impulsive interposition, had tangled things irrevocably.

The thought of Glory's failure was engulfed in her own sense of shame at her deceit.

"Where could I write you, Mr. Cassilis?" inquired the nurse.

Cassilis shrugged his shoulders. "My address is the good old gipsy address," he said a trifle bitterly. "The wide, wide world. I may be here for a day or two. Then, thanks to you"—he smiled at Ruth Ferintosh—"I am going to run down to Bothwell for a day, and see my old stamping grounds."

Glory Adair glanced at her wrist-watch. "We can catch that train to Carisford if we hurry," she suggested. Smiling, she said good-by to Cassilis.

The young man waited till she had passed through the door. "I can walk down with you to the platform?" he told Ruth; and they followed, out of ear-shot.

She was embarrassed. He was calling her Miss Adair. She flushed and broke out impetuously:

"I wish you wouldn't call me Miss Adair. I'm not Miss Adair. I'm Ruth Ferintosh. I—"

He halted, gazing hard at her.

"And that young lady," he said at last, "was Miss Adair?"

Ruth nodded miserably.

"She carried off the situation very nicely," remarked Cassilis. "I rather admire her aplomb. I suppose that is your train?" he added.

He took her hands. She smiled at him. "Good-by," she said.

She saw Glory Adair beckoning her, urging haste; and she ran at last.

"You nearly missed the train," said the nurse.

Ruth sighed deeply. She had made her confession; she had relieved her conscience of its horrid burden of deception—and had been honest to the last tragic limits with this man, who might be the son of a murderer.

"Glory," she said, "I know I was horrid."

"You were," agreed Glory relentlessly.

"I don't know what I can do to make things right." The poor girl was all contrition.

"I know," said Nurse Adair practically. "You can keep all this from Tripp."

Ruth sat silent, in fancy still seeing the dark eyes of Peter Cassilis searching her.

"Glory."

"Yes."

"Glory—what did his hands tell you?"

"Plague take the man!" ejaculated Glory Adair. "He never let me see his hands. I never saw a man like him, but—from first to last, he kept his palms hid."

CHAPTER XX.

RUTH KEEPS SILENCE—QUITE.

WHEN Glory Adair saw her taxicab disappear down the avenue she at once thought of Tripp. Tripp was plainly responsible for this unexpected misadventure. Tripp had seen her letter, pur-

loined it—for she could find it nowhere—and had acted on the spur of the moment, with his usual brisk decision.

Her ten minutes' margin of safety, however, gave her ample time to call a second taxicab and catch her train. Thus, instead of reaching London five hours behind Ruth Ferintosh, as Ruth had calculated, Glory Adair reached the hotel barely ten minutes after the doors of the grill-room admitted Peter Cassilis and Ruth.

What the hotel clerk told her of Mr. Cassilis taking a Miss Adair in to dinner puzzled Glory a little; even then she did not think of Ruth. For she had really not credited the impetuous girl with so much bold initiative.

Finding Ruth at table with Cassilis, however, she at once caught Ruth's cue and played the game. She was perfectly willing to be Miss Ferintosh for the nonce, and Ruth could remain Miss Adair—all the nurse cared about was information, and it did not matter under what name she secured it. She was relieved, in fact, to find that the wrench thrown into the machinery was merely Ruth, and not Tripp.

"I told him," whispered Ruth, as the westbound train pulled out for Carisford.

That, too, was like Ruth. She was honest at heart, and could not thrive on deceit. She had to make a clean breast of things, even to Cassilis.

Now, for the first time, Glory Adair was a little troubled by Ruth's cognizance of these things. Ruth had promised to keep silent regarding Cassilis, but Ruth was impetuous. So, Ruth might at any moment blurt out everything.

"Now," said Glory Adair grimly, "I want to warn you again, Miss Ferintosh. You go home. You meet Captain Grant. Then you tell him, first thing, that you met a soldier named Cassilis at London."

Ruth's telltale glance confirmed the nurse's worst expectations.

"That is just what is in your mind right now!" exclaimed Glory. "Stop it! Stop before you start. You tell absolutely no one—not even Captain Grant—no, not even your mother—about this."

"But," argued the girl rebelliously, "surely Captain Grant—"

Glory Adair's brow puckered. Yes, Ruth's intrusion would constitute a persistent menace—she must stamp on that menace right now.

"You see," she urged gently, "Captain Grant is very much in love with you. He might put an entirely wrong construction on what has occurred. You go alone to a strange city, you meet a strange man at a strange hotel, you lunch with him—and without a chaperon—"

Ruth flushed.

"But Mr. Cassilis is a gentleman."

"I hope so. Still, he doesn't seem to get that from his parents. You heard what he told us? You listened, didn't you?" Her tone grew almost harsh; Ruth *must* be impressed. "Ninety-nine people out of a hundred, hearing what he told us, would say at once—those gipsies killed this man Tom Fagg. And he's their son. You had better keep silence regarding this visit."

Ruth subsided, still protesting.

"It surely wasn't his fault what *they* did!" was her final protest.

But Glory Adair was immersed in study of the problem she had brought back from her talk with Cassilis.

These old-time by-paths her inquiries had disclosed were tempting—insidiously so. But she must avoid them and keep strictly to the main road, which was the life-trail of Ferintosh and Creighton. What Cassilis had told her was of value only insofar as it concerned these two men; and after all, it concerned Ferintosh very little and Creighton not at all.

Indeed, the one vital circumstance was the answer Cassilis had given to her last hopeless question. He had seen a man who might have been Ferintosh hunting in the woods at Bothwell.

That, after all, meant little. Peter Cassilis was then seven or eight years old. His memory might be at fault; he might not have seen the man at all; he might have seen him in some totally different place. And, at that, the man might not have been Ferintosh.

The Norfolk suit—and even as to that Cassilis might be in error—was just a suggestion of the young Englishman freshly arrived in Canada.

She had discovered nothing actually to connect Ferintosh with the gipsy queen. Ferintosh, apparently, had never visited the gipsy camp or consulted Mme. Rose Cassilis—for if he had, the boy would probably have been there, and the man's visit would have left a deeper impress on his mind than the chance glimpse of him with his gun in the woods.

There still remained the shot Cassilis had heard, and his finding of the charred and blood-stained clothes under the brush pile. This, following the disappearance of Fagg and preceded by the reading of Fagg's hand and the accidental glimpse of the woman had caught of Fagg's roll of bills—and her subsequent warning to the boy to say nothing of his discovery lest it make trouble—all pointed unmistakably to the gipsies as guilty of making away with Fagg.

Yet Cassilis himself had sat at table with them less than an hour ago, sipped his coffee, and told the whole incriminating story with the utmost frankness.

The one detail that seemed to embarrass him was the circumstance that his parents were gipsies. That they might be guilty of that bygone murder—that what he was telling would assuredly incriminate them in the eyes of an impartial hearer—seemed never to have entered his mind.

They were dead, of course, and beyond reach of the law; but even at that his attitude was incomprehensible unless he had so sublime a faith in their innocence that he had never been troubled even by the logical and inevitable suspicion that they were guilty. Otherwise, his story bespoke an amazing degree of callousness.

Yet these things in no way touched Malcolm Ferintosh.

There remained merely a surmise. This was, that the gipsies had indeed murdered Fagg; but that Ferintosh had received the benefit in the shape of money to drill his gusher. That would afford the gipsies a foothold for subsequent blackmail.

But that solution was entirely irreconcilable with the high character of Malcolm Ferintosh as she had read it in his hand.

If, indeed, her reading of the man's hand was wrong—if he had been actually a criminal paying blackmail to cover up his crime

—who, now, had levied the blackmail? She, like Tripp, had identified the three foreigners dogging the footsteps of Ferintosh with the gipsies camped in the woods at Bothwell.

But Peter Cassilis the elder was dead, and so was his wife Rose. Peter the boy was now a man of thirty-three. Whence came the foreign-looking man, the woman with the red handkerchief, and the little boy whom Robinson had repeatedly seen? Had Cassilis indeed told the whole truth?

She wished she had been able to read his hand. He had, however, kept his palms hid—the action seemed almost habitual. That species of concealment augured ill. Had Cassilis, after all, some connection with the mysterious messages that for months had been left at Ferintosh House? For that matter, when had the man returned from overseas—and where was he when the last message came a few nights before?

"Well," she mused with decision, "if I had asked him, I would likely have learned nothing. For if he were guilty, he would merely have told me lies—and I had no means of checking up his movements."

Ruth Ferintosh fretted at the silence imposed upon her. Glory Adair had gaged the girl's impulses unerringly. She wanted to talk to Captain Grant about Peter Cassilis—she wanted to tell somebody—anybody—about him.

Restrained by the injunction to observe strict silence, she went to her room and sulked. She told her mother she had visited the London shops to look at hats. Then she was secretly angry at Glory Adair for making her tell lies when the truth would have been so much pleasanter.

Then a new phase of the affair began to worry her. She had confessed to Cassilis her deception, but she had not told him she was sorry. Glory was to blame for that; Glory had hurried her unduly. Cassilis was a gentleman—she could tell that. What must he think of a girl who brazenly confessed her misdeeds, but showed no contrition?

That idea haunted her all evening. She nibbled at her dinner in constrained si-

lence. She went to her room early. Cassilis, she remembered as she went up-stairs, would leave London in a day or two.

Impulsive as always, she sat down and scribbled a hasty note to him. She had left in a hurry; she had intended to say how sorry she was for her deception and had forgotten to do so; she had omitted to thank him for his *very great* kindness; she did both now *from the bottom of her heart*. She paused to underscore the emphatic words.

Then she signed herself, "Sincerely yours, Ruth Ferintosh," and addressed an envelope. There—she had not violated Glory's injunctions in the least!

Just then a few chance words Cassilis had uttered came back to her mind. She scribbled:

P. S.—Did you say you were coming to Bothwell? When you are so near, why not come right through to Carisford and meet Captain Grant?

She sealed the envelope, and searched her writing-table for a stamp. She found none. At that the vexed child began biting her lips, for she wanted to get this thing done and over with, so that her conscience would be clear.

She rose at last, crossed the hall, and tapped on Glory's door.

"Yes, dear?"

"Have you a postage-stamp?"

Glory, immersed in a new study of her collection of hand-prints, mechanically produced the stamp and returned to her microscope. Ruth thanked her. The next minute she was scurrying down the stairs to mail her letter at the corner box. That done, she at once repented. Her conscience recommenced troubling her on a new score. But the letter was gone now, beyond recall.

Glory Adair's careful study of the hand-print of Malcolm Ferintosh confirmed in every detail her first reading of his character. She tried not to be opinionated, as Tripp was; she tried to view her subject from a new angle; she turned over and over in her mind everything she had learned of him from Dr. Wright, from Creighton, from

Mrs. Ferintosh, from Ruth, from a cloud of witnesses—her conclusion throughout remained the same.

This man was no killer, no thief, and not the man to build his fortune on a corner-stone of blood-money.

Next morning the nurse was struck by something unusual in the atmosphere of Ferintosh House. She had a vague feeling that something vital was missing; the feeling puzzled her.

Then she remembered that it was a couple of days, if not more, since she had seen Tripp.

So she made inquiries of Mrs. Ferintosh. Tripp, it seemed, had left for the west again, pursuing some new clue.

Mrs. Ferintosh viewed the situation with her inevitable serenity. She had no doubt that this time Mr. Tripp would make important discoveries.

Glory Adair talked a long time with Mrs. Ferintosh. She had a vague idea that if she talked long enough and innocently enough, Mrs. Ferintosh must inevitably let drop at least a few words regarding Tripp's latest discoveries. But it would seem that Tripp had not taken her into his confidence.

Mrs. Ferintosh eventually remembered a letter that had come for her half an hour before.

Glory Adair had almost forgotten that she had advertised in a Detroit paper as well as the one at Toronto. She had long since given up hope of any replies. But this letter came from Detroit.

It concerned Fagg, of course; but she expected nothing new. This would be merely the same old story she had got from Ellicott, and later from Cassilis. There were doubtless many people in Detroit who vaguely remembered the itinerant photographer from the Bothwell days.

So she opened the envelope quite without hope, and found a surprising message.

Tom Fagg himself was in Detroit. Or, at least, a man named Fagg was, it appeared, staying at a rooming-house on Jefferson Avenue. P. R. Kennedy, evidently a fellow roomer, described Fagg as a quiet, reticent man with a gray beard, who seemed to work at some distance from the house,

since he was away all day long. Evidently a mechanic, though he made no confidences.

Here was a new turn of events. Tom Fagg, supposed to have been murdered at Bothwell twenty-five years ago, still alive, only a couple of hours' distance away from Carlsford, and pursuing a quiet, inconspicuous way.

Glory Adair refused to believe that this was the same man. After what Ellicott, the Bothwell paper, the county authorities, and finally Peter Cassilis himself had told her, the thing was incredible.

Nevertheless, she took the next train for Detroit.

She had no difficulty in finding the Jefferson Avenue rooming-house. There, however, her quest abruptly ended. The man named Fagg had left the place two days before.

The disappointed nurse questioned the landlady. More than that, she remained till nightfall and interviewed Kennedy, the man who had written her regarding Fagg. Kennedy was a shifty-eyed young fellow, and Glory was at first disposed to suspect that he had been angling for a possible reward. But further questioning of the landlady, her husband, and some of the other roomers indicated that Kennedy was actually telling the truth; that a man named Fagg had actually been a roomer there.

"Tom Fagg?" she asked again.

As to that there was no certainty. This man received no mail; he came and went quietly, and minded his own business; he was away for days at a time, and when there kept to his room and spoke to no one.

Glory Adair asked to see the room. She had fancied she might discern some of the telltale stains that betokened the photographer. But the room offered no clue to its former occupant's identity. Fagg, thus unexpectedly found, had as unexpectedly lost himself.

She paid the shifty-eyed young man out of her own purse a reward large enough to encourage him to keep his eyes open and to write her promptly in case Fagg reappeared. But her next morning's inquiries of the policeman on that particular beat

and of photographers who might have known of such a workman in their line proved fruitless.

So eventually she went back to Carisford.

• It was late afternoon when she arrived at Ferintosh House. Ruth met her, brimful of excitement.

"He's here!" she announced.

"He? Who?"

"Mr. Cassilis."

Glory Adair stared at the girl.

"How did he find his way?" she demanded sharply. "I never told him."

"Nor I."

Ruth looked away from her a dubious moment. But then her conscience vindicated itself.

"I invited him," she said. "Oh, you needn't frown, Miss Adair. He's a gentleman—I just know he is—and he's here, anyway, so it can't be helped. Mother insisted that he stay for dinner and meet Captain Grant."

Glory Adair fervently hoped that Cassilis would go before Tripp came back. The next minute, though, she recognized, with a sinking heart, that the damage had been done.

CHAPTER XXII.

ANTAGONISM.

AT dinner Ruth sat next to Cassilis. Captain Grant had come later than usual, so that there was barely time for Mrs. Ferintosh to introduce the two men before dinner was served. Robinson waited at table, as was usual on state occasions.

Captain Grant was in his customary good spirits. He chatted with Miss Adair, smiled across table at Ruth, and exchanged a few friendly words now and then with his former comrade in arms.

Cassilis was oddly unresponsive. The man's taciturnity left an unpleasant impression on the company. Only Mrs. Ferintosh seemed not to notice or be oppressed by it.

From time to time Cassilis glanced up from his plate to fix a searching gaze on

Grant. But of this searching gaze the captain seemed quite oblivious.

"This is better than the Somme—eh, Cassilis?" he challenged.

"I'll say it," agreed the other in a tone strangely dead and unemotional—as though he were preoccupied with bitter thoughts.

He turned to Ruth and whispered. She colored a little and nodded assent to his question. Glory Adair knew enough of lip-reading and human nature to surmise what was the query Cassilis had voiced and to which Ruth had responded with that flush and the accompanying nod.

"Your fiancé?"

Did the fact that Grant was Ruth's fiancé—as Mrs. Ferintosh had stated in introducing the men—account for the evident embarrassment of Cassilis and his coldness toward Grant? Was it the difference in their rank—Grant a captain, Cassilis a non-com—that oppressed the newcomer? Surely not, for to-night, in civies, they met on the same social plane.

Or was there, back of these things, some shadowing incident that dated back to the time when the men served together overseas?

These surmises occurred to Glory Adair, as she noted, more than once, that curiously intent stare with which Cassilis repeatedly regarded Grant. The dinner, however, was nearly over when she became suddenly conscious that, beneath his gaiety, the captain entertained something of the same hostility toward the newcomer.

In the sitting-room, afterward, Grant proffered his cigarette-case.

"You remember this, Cassilis?" he said with a smile. "It went with me through the Somme."

"No," returned Cassilis shortly. "Sorry to say, captain, I don't remember it."

With which Cassilis opened his own cigar-case and selected a cigar. He glanced inquiringly at Mrs. Ferintosh.

"By all means, Mr. Cassilis," approved that lady. She could not have missed the flash of tacit hostility; but she hid her recognition of it very well.

Cassilis smoked in silence for some moments. Glory studied his face; then her eyes dropped to his hands. Yes, he did

habitually hold them with the palms concealed. What she had thought might be a mere precaution that day at London was unmistakably a fixed habit.

The talk for many moments drifted along inconsequentially, Ruth innocently taking the lead. She, apparently, had noticed nothing out of the way in the attitude of the two men. She was elated at having brought them together and made no effort to conceal her satisfaction.

Grant presently excused himself and joined Mrs. Ferintosh at the farther end of the long room. Cassilis was left with Ruth and Miss Adair. Ruth and Cassilis were in the very midst of an eager conversation. The man's embarrassment seemed to have quite passed off.

Glory Adair, quite outside this conversation, except for a chance word or two, let her eyes stray toward Grant. Grant, she observed, was whispering earnestly to Mrs. Ferintosh. The latter looked up and fixed her eyes a moment on Cassilis. She seemed to dissent from something Grant had just said; what words she uttered came to Glory's ear as a low, placating murmur. Grant insisted.

Mrs. Ferintosh rose. For the first time she spoke above a whisper.

"Very well," she said in a tone so clear that all the room could not help but hear her, "we will ask Mr. Cassilis himself."

Cassilis was on his feet already. It veritably seemed as though he had anticipated attack, and was in bristling readiness to meet it.

As Mrs. Ferintosh came up he bowed to her deferentially, and stood silent, awaiting what she had to say.

The lady turned to Captain Grant. Grant smiled suavely.

"I am afraid, sergeant," he said, "there has been a trifling misapprehension on my part. I understood from Miss Ferintosh that you claimed to be an old pal of mine, and that you were with me in the Somme fight?"

Cassilis spoke, not to Grant, however, but to Mrs. Ferintosh:

"It is quite true that I told Miss Ferintosh I was with Captain Grant at the Somme."

"Then," said Captain Grant significantly, "that must have been after I was wounded, when I was delirious."

His meaning could not be mistaken. Cassilis still spoke, however, to Mrs. Ferintosh, his tone low and even:

"It is true I talked to Captain Grant while he lay wounded, but he was quite himself. I am positive there was no delirium."

Grant kept his composure. He even smiled. His next words, though quietly spoken, came, however, like a thunder-clap:

"I am sorry, Mrs. Ferintosh, to create unpleasantness in the home where I am your guest. Still, I considered it a duty to speak to you and a privilege to do so privately—and I can only repeat before this gentleman what I told you just now. I never met him before, at the Somme or elsewhere, much less spoke to him. I do not say he is an impostor, but I do say that you are entitled to see his credentials."

An embarrassed silence followed. The sound of Robinson moving softly about in the butler's pantry, the clink of dishes in the distant kitchen, the ticking of the grandfather's clock in the vestibule, all struck loud into the tragic stillness.

All eyes were turned on Cassilis. Ruth drew a step closer to him.

"I said *Captain Grant*," returned Cassilis hotly. "*You* are not Captain Grant."

A moment Captain Grant regarded him with evident bewilderment.

"No?" he countered with an amused smile. "Then, tell me, who am I?" His flash of amusement passed; he turned grimly to Mrs. Ferintosh. "This is a very serious charge. I am sorry this unpleasantness had to arise after our very pleasant dinner. I am quite prepared to prove my identity, if this gentleman is prepared to prove his. I will match credential against credential. Will you examine *this*, Mrs. Ferintosh?"

This was his discharge certificate. The woman turned it over and over in her hands. For once in her life she seemed at a loss.

She handed the paper mechanically to Glory Adair.

The nurse examined it and passed it on to Cassilis. The man read the document through and made a wry face.

"This seems quite in order," he said. "*Seems.*" He repeated the word with sneering emphasis. "I have heard of such documents being forged, but," he conceded reluctantly, "this one appears genuine."

"Now," said Grant, "it is your turn, Mr. Cassilis."

"My discharge certificate," said Cassilis, "is in my trunk, and my trunk is out West. I suppose I should carry my certificate?"

"Assuredly," commented Grant dryly.

"On this trip to London I did not bring it; it was merely a flying visit—so I planned—and I traveled light."

"You can send for it."

"I can get it."

"It is a pity," remarked Grant, "that it is not here now. However, I, personally, accept your word as to the certificate. You will, of course, satisfy Mrs. Ferintosh as to your *bona fides*." He paused. "As to what I said before, of never having met you, seen you, or spoken to you, at the Somme fight or elsewhere, I can only repeat that."

Here impetuous Ruth interrupted.

"I am sure mama is satisfied," she exclaimed. "It's a pity," she went on, "that you men couldn't have got your fill of fighting over there. Can't you shake hands and at least declare an armistice? You're *both* my friends, you know."

Grant proffered his hand. "Shall we cry quits?" he urged.

Mrs. Ferintosh smiled encouragingly at Cassilis. Evidently she expected him to shake hands with Grant. But he stood, straight as an arrow, steady and unyielding.

"No," he said quietly, "we cannot cry quits. I knew Kenric Chisholm Grant for a year and more overseas. We met often." He turned to the nurse. "Miss Adair," he remarked, "you knew that same Kenric Chisholm Grant. Look at this man closely. Is he the same?"

Glory Adair regarded Grant fixedly. The young man met her gaze without flinching.

"Miss Adair," said Grant quietly, "had

not seen me for over ten years. I was a boy of sixteen the last time I saw her at Maitland Port. I suppose I have changed a great deal in ten years. Any one does, especially a growing boy."

"A minute, if you please," said Cassilis. "Miss Adair, under the circumstances I could hardly expect you to recognize Captain Grant. It is hardly a fair test," he conceded. "But—I think this is a fair question—when you met again, did his face seem familiar to you? Did it appeal to you as a face you had seen before?"

"That," agreed Grant, "is a fair question."

Glory Adair pondered. Her brown eyes warmed.

"Don't you see, friends," she urged, "how difficult the question is? You see, Ruth had told me Captain Grant was coming. I was expecting him."

Her mind was judicial. Through all the incidents and more or less hazy recollections surrounding Captain Grant's advent and their first meeting at Ferintosh House she tried painstakingly to grepe her way to the exact truth. She was anxious to be just, alike to Grant and to his accuser.

So she sat a long moment, looking at Grant, searching his face, and going back in her own mind to the day he came to Ferintosh House, when she had her first glimpse of him after more than ten years. How had he impressed her at that first glimpse? She started up presently with a little cry.

"Oh! I remember now. It was like this. I wouldn't have known him for Ken Grant—that's certain. But no matter where I'd met him, I'd have had the feeling that we'd met before. Knowing Captain Grant was in Carisford, I naturally knew him at once."

She remembered now, vividly, that first glimpse—her first hurried musing. "I've seen that face before, somewhere—yes, of course, it's Ken Grant."

Cassilis seemed very much discomfited. Evidently he had not expected this rebuff.

"Miss Adair," repeated Grant steadily, "had not seen me in more than ten years—just as I told you. You have her answer. I can tell something of the very last time

I saw her, when, as a boy of fifteen or sixteen, I left Maitland Port. It was early morning, and I went with my parents in a hack to the station.

"August," he went on dreamily, "an August morning, toward seven o'clock. Glory came down to her gate as we drove past—she lived a few doors from us—and she waved her hand to me. I was crying at going away—I was a soft-hearted youngster, I guess," he added apologetically.

"Well, what I've gone through these last few years has knocked a lot of the nonsense out of me. I did not wave to her. I felt too miserable. There were trumpet vines all over the porch, I remember—the porch ran down one side of your house, Glory, and the vines were all in bloom.

"Well," he added, "I remembered Glory Adair most vividly just as she was then, and she must have remembered me most vividly as the boy I was in those days. I changed more than she did, I suppose, in those ten years."

Glory Adair nodded. All these things he told them were true. She then turned to Cassilis.

"It is just as he says, and just as I said," she told him again. "I would not have known him had we met in a strange place, but even in a strange place his face would certainly have seemed familiar."

"But his hand?" exclaimed Cassilis. "The lines?"

"I knew nothing of palmistry then."

Mrs. Ferintosh intervened.

"Surely she urged in her steady tone, 'there is no need to argue any further?'"

Grant again proffered his hand. But Cassilis stubbornly refused to take it. He muttered something under his breath. Grant flushed at the insistent insult.

He stood a moment, glowering angrily at Cassilis; his even temper seemed to have at last succumbed to this persistent antagonism.

"Very well," he said. "You see, Mrs. Ferintosh, our friend here refuses to be satisfied with proof that would meet the demands of any normal person. Yet I am willing to furnish every proof that you, or any one—even Mr. Cassilis—can require."

"But I am sure I am satisfied," said Mrs. Ferintosh. "We are all satisfied."

This time Ruth Ferintosh did not echo her mother's conciliatory words. Glory Adair flashed a glance at the girl, and was amazed. If looks told anything, Ruth was siding entirely with Cassilis and against her own fiancé in this unseemly controversy. Perhaps, though, the girl's attitude was merely another expression of her undercurrent of revolt against the rule of her stately, well-poised mother.

"We are all satisfied," agreed Grant, "except Mr. Cassilis. I mean to satisfy him. Miss Adair"—he turned again to the nurse—"knew me when we were little, ten years ago, and for some years before that. She will remember a great many things that happened then.

"I would suggest that she ask me what questions she likes regarding those times. You can catechise me as severely as you like, Glory." He smiled. "I can answer right, nine times out of ten—yes, ten times out of ten. If I make a single misstatement I am willing to leave this house in disgrace. Will that satisfy you, Mr. Cassilis?"

Cassilis did not answer. Mrs. Ferintosh frowned ever so slightly. The thing was unprecedented in her social experience.

"As a personal favor, Mrs. Ferintosh?" urged Grant. "My honor as a soldier and a gentleman has been impugned, and I regard it a privilege to vindicate myself to the utmost—always with your kind consent."

Mrs. Ferintosh inclined her head ever so slightly.

Glory Adair seated herself at one end of the table, and Grant took his place at the other. Cassilis drew his chair forward, where he could watch his antagonist closely. Ruth—so Glory Adair noticed—settled herself next to Cassilis, on the side farthest from Captain Grant. Mrs. Ferintosh kept herself in the background.

"May I smoke, your lordship?" asked Grant; and, at a permissive nod from Glory, lit a cigarette. "Now," he added, "I am in the witness-box. You may proceed, Miss Adair."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

One in Four Million

by Leonard Edward



DAMN that lint!" Audibly expressed and unintentionally, it caused Sebast Moore, who had uttered the profane words, to look down from his lofty perch upon a row of prim but flushed spinsterly faces.

Sebast Moore, A. B., the "A. B." recently acquired, utterly inexperienced at anything practical, working only because he had to eat, starting at the bottom, as all successful men do or say they do, had made rapid progress that morning—with the aid of a step-ladder. Otherwise he would have still been at the bottom. He was washing windgws, the dingy windows of Clute & Williams, Insurance, and he wouldn't have been doing that if old man Clute had dared trust this son of a departed friend with work such as his efficient old maids were doing.

At washing windows, Moore was no success. Perhaps because he had never done it before. He could sop a wet rag around until it was grimy, he could renew the water on every other window, he could apply soap and remove the dirt, but when it came to drying them with a clean cloth, the lint remained behind, as adhesive as cooties, as annoying as a cheap tooth-brush that leaves bristles in its trail to be discovered hours later.

After damning the lint, and forgetting the looks of the shocked ladies, and con-

cluding that haste really does make waste, and not fancying going over each speckled window until it was glossy and speckless as all newly cleansed panes should be, Moore remained seated atop his pedestal and hopefully contemplated obtaining or inventing a remedy.

"How did they wash windows, anyway?" He thought of asking one of the women, but concluded not to do it—you never know when a maiden lady will be offended—and besides he didn't dare after that cuss-word. He did remember drawing pictures on windows that had been soaped, had dried, and then had been wiped clean. But he didn't have that kind of soap. His was a yellow bar, smooth and greasy, and besides old Clute would not tolerate the purchase of a soap solely for windows. No, indeed!

And since Moore had to be at his janitorial duties by 7.30 A.M. he had come in contact with a new group of wage-earners, a group he never knew existed, the window-cleaners, who needs must arise early in the morning and finish dousing vast expanses of plate glass before feminine feet begin to tread the sloppy sidewalks. Moore remembered that they wielded a wicked, long-handled mop, dripping lavishly, and then scraped the water from top to bottom with a rubber and lintless tool that did a finished job the first time over just as a good lawnmower should do.

Moore didn't have that instrument either. Neither was he going to give up. What is it they say about laziness being the mother-in-law of invention? Perhaps!

At any rate, Moore sat and thought, something new for him, for usually when he sat he just sat. Simply that and no more.

Sometimes an idea will come to a person, and if original or feasible, or maybe absurd or whimsical, it is going to cause just a little vanity. That's what happened to Moore. One would have thought he had hit upon the cheap substitute for gasoline or something equally important. He clambered down from the ladder with an agility that caused the more timorous of the spinners to turn around in fear that he had fallen. He glanced up and surveyed the untouched windows, absolutely dirty, and then the ones, which, though absolutely clean, looked far worse. He nodded knowingly; his problem was solved.

The big idea—paper towels. Why not! They were used in the wash-room; why not to dry the windows?

Moore thought it over. Possible? Certainly! But like most of his haphazard ideas it had its drawbacks. First and last, it would take an enormous quantity and the pinch-penny Clute would never stand for that. But it suggested newspapers, and those were easily obtained. He returned with an enormous armful which he deposited on the floor, and then taking a whole first section once more, ascended to the scene of his erstwhile activities.

And still he did not even try out his new scheme. An item caught his eye and for the instant windows were forgotten. Moore was more interested in reading the little, short account telling that statisticians had figured that four million people would make income-tax returns for the ensuing year.

The top of the step-ladder was an ideal place to assume the attitude of the thinker. Moore bemoaned the fact that he, on fifteen per, was not included among the four million. And why not? That's what he was trying to decide. It was a tougher problem than his previous one, and Moore was so engrossed in trying to dope out a way to become one of the elect that he did not notice the presence of old man Clute until

a gruff, surly, startling "Well" aroused him from his lethargy.

Moore looked up.

"Well, is all this necessary?" demanded Clute somewhat ironically.

Moore really did not know what his employer meant. "What's necessary?" he asked.

"Those papers here; what are they doing?"

Moore was now master of his wits again. The papers had a definite relation to his work.

"Oh! The papers! They are very necessary, Mr. Clute. You see, I have discovered a new way of washing windows. I have learned that a rag leaves the pane covered with lint and the sole remedy is to wipe them with a paper and thus avoid—"

"Yes, yes." Impatiently. "I understand; but how does it work in practise? Your theory sounds all right."

Moore's face lengthened. He stammered: "You see, Mr. Clute, I just hit upon the idea and I haven't had time to try it out yet."

"So I see. You have to read each paper first so that it won't be a total loss. Very considerate and economical of you, indeed. And as much as it grieves me I'm afraid you'll never have the opportunity to put your theory into practise, that is, for Clute & Williams."

"Then you intend to fire me?" Moore asked quizzically.

"I already have," Mr. Clute informed him.

And Sebast Moore departed from his first job, the newspapers, the cause of his downfall still under his arm, and the thought that he was still further away from the four million vivid in his memory. He had an idea, however, and, consulting the newspaper, even though it was four days old, he jotted down the locations of several offices that were to rent.

Moore was a fast worker, once he got started, and in half an hour's time he had signed a month's lease—he couldn't afford a longer one—and had arranged for immediate delivery of a second-hand desk and chair. He bought a can of paint and a brush, and before there was even a remote

sign of the office being occupied he proudly and crudely began to letter the door.

The corridor was dark and dingy. No one seemed to be about. And were it not for signs on the doors of other offices and on the directory in the street-floor entrance, Moore might easily have imagined himself the sole occupant of the building, or at least, his floor.

Diagonally across the corridor was a door labeled:

BIXBY—BROKER.

And inside, unseen and unheard by Moore, one Nonita Sand was getting rid of an employer, quite the opposite of what had just happened to Moore.

She was just beginning to typify her name. At that very moment she had concluded she was tired of her humdrum job, that she was going to make a change and that before she did she would tell her employer just where he got off, which is a thing all of us have the ambition to do some time in our lives.

She went direct to the point, if nothing else.

"Mr. Bixby," she asked, "when are you going to give me a typewriter for this old-fashioned office?"

Ezra Bixby blinked. Such impertinence was novel to him.

"Why, Miss Sand. What do you mean? You know I've never considered a typewriter; it's quite unnecessary."

"It is as long as you don't have to write the letters," she retorted. "And an adding machine. I simply won't work here any longer without one."

Nonita had been aching to say something like that, and now, after a long wait, she was in the throes of an ambition attained.

Mr. Bixby was astounded at the straightforwardness of his hitherto meek and efficient secretary. Perhaps she had been reading some Bolshevik literature and was trying to bully him. Mr. Bixby was not the man to stand for that.

"Miss Sand," he said, "that will do. You've said quite enough. I shall continue to run this business without the aid of new-

fangled devices as I have done in the past. I shall solicit advice when I think I need it." And he gave emphasis to the statement by pounding his desk violently.

Nonita was neither impressed nor disturbed. She continued coolly to air her grievances.

"You don't think of easing a subordinate's burdens. Modern aids mean nothing to you. You think your ancient methods are good enough and that's why your business is—"

Here Bixby spluttered. "I'll have no references to the way I conduct my business. If you're not careful, Miss Sand, I'll have—I'll have to reduce your pay as is consistent with the present economic tendencies."

He had intended to say that he would have to let her go, but quickly realized that an equal would be hard to find and that much time would be lost in schooling another into the intricacies of his brokering business. Bixby realized that she was too valuable to lose.

Nonita was aware of what was going through Bixby's mind. "You almost fired me, Mr. Bixby," she said. "But there's no need of it. I'm tired of your office; I've got initiative even if I've never shown it and I've concluded to go somewhere where imagination is required."

"You're going to leave me?" Bixby was actually alarmed. "After all I've done for you? After—after—"

"After refusing to buy me a typewriter" concluded Nonita.

"But I will," promised Mr. Bixby.

"Too late now," she retorted. "And before I go please take down that last year's calendar which I am sure you are not saving for the picture of the pretty girl. You know it adds to the impression that that the business is asleep."

Bixby was astounded to silence. He watched Nonita jauntily leave his office, and as he heard her close the outer door his mouth twitched and his head sank upon his chest.

Nonita experienced a feeling of freedom. Jobless, with little money, yet absolutely without a worry in the world, she stepped into the dingy corridor and halted to draw

on her gloves. Then she saw, for the first time, Sebast Moore, occupied with his work of lettering the door of that long-vacant office.

Nonita was no more than human when she lingered to gaze at a sign-painter at work. There is a fascination that grips all of us who watch the beginning, guess the finish, and are usually happily disappointed, in the progress of a sign. As she pulled on and drew off her gloves intermittently to give some reason for her tarrying should the painter become aware of her presence, Nonita concluded it was no expert artist who had completed a top-heavy, unsymmetrical "S," a squat, toppled "E." As a "BAS" followed she decided the name was to be Sebastian and she longed to take the brush and complete it herself. But a "T" ended the word and no period followed it. Another word was started, but the work was interrupted by the arrival of a badly-battered chair and a desk. Moore dropped his brush and directed the placing of the furniture and, after paying the teamsters, returned to his task, still unaware of Nonita's presence.

She was more than idly curious now. The young man must be starting in business for himself, and evidently on a limited capital. The sign neared completion; Nonita could easily supply the missing letters that were needed to finish the crude and laboriously lettered sign which now read:

SEBAST MOORE
Income Tax Exp

Nonita went to lunch, the strange name lingering in her memory. She imagined all sorts of fanciful things concerning him and she envied him, for evidently he was staking his daring against disaster. He must be an adventurer chancing a small loss against the overwhelming odds of a big gain. She had to do something, so why not take a plunge? What money she had wouldn't last very long if she continued eating a dollar's worth of nothing at a soda-fountain every time she was the least mite hungry.

A definite plan was forming in Nonita's mind, stimulated by the excitement in en-

counters with men like Bixby, and by the zest in making suppositions concerning men like Sebast Moore. She paid her check and unhesitatingly went to the public library which she had used to advantage in her work with Bixby. This time volumes on income taxation commanded her attention. They were dry reading, but all Nonita desired was a smattering of technical phrases.

She picked them at random and jotted them down in a note-book. An hour later she was once more on the third floor of the building, and at the same hour that she was accustomed to return to work from her noon-day lunch. This time she sought the newly lettered door and unhesitatingly walked in without knocking.

Her dramatic entrance, which she had planned, had the desired startling effect on the sole occupant who stood with his hands in his trouser pockets looking at an empty desk, evidently trying to figure what to do with so much vacant space.

Sebast Moore was the first to speak. "I beg your pardon, but aren't you—aren't you mistaken?"

"You're—I mean is this Mr. Moore's office?" inquired Nonita, who had nearly forgotten her carefully prepared speech.

"It is," said Moore.

"May I see him?" she asked without a smile.

"I'm him," Moore confessed ungrammatically and somewhat flustered.

"Oh!"

Moore wondered whether that expressed surprise or dismay.

Nonita continued. "I'd like advice about my income tax."

"Yes?" he inquired. He was wondering how she had happened to come to him so soon after the opening of his office.

"You can help me, can't you?"

"Surely—certainly—of course!" Moore was trying to make a doubtful tone sound emphatic. He wasn't prepared for business, yet he couldn't afford to go long without any. Now a doctor or a dentist—the problem was solved.

"I can give you an appointment, Miss, Miss—"

"Sand," Nonita supplied.

"I can arrange to see you Monday. How

would that suit you?" Moore asked in his most solicitous tones.

Nonita smiled in an amused way until Moore looked directly at her when she was forced to change it to a smile of regret. "I'm sorry," she said, "I can't wait until then."

"Won't you sit down?" he asked, determined to keep her.

Moore did not notice that Miss Sand was enjoying his discomfiture. He produced a paper and pencil, and in a most professional manner sought what he considered necessary information.

"Any other sources of income?" he asked after Nonita had enumerated several. He thought things were progressing nicely, pleased with his astuteness, but ignorant that Nonita was watching him, her lips pursed to suppress a smile.

"Let's see," she said, and turned to her notes. "Oh, yes!" she exclaimed in feigned surprise. "Here are some items I must have overlooked. They are mostly stocks and bonds and I don't know what they yield, so you'd better take a list to be able to determine—"

"Of course," interrupted Moore.

"There's twenty-five thousand in Arctic Fisheries, forty-five—"

Nonita did not finish. A low whistle from Moore's lips stopped her. He had absently pictured himself receiving a proportionate fee big enough to supply him with a motor, a new office where, in luxuriously appointed surroundings, he could reap—

This was as far as his dream got. Nonita brought him out of it.

"Got that?" she asked, and Moore had to admit his negligence.

Nonita could not go on with the deception. She laughed out loud at the bewildered Moore. "And now, Mr. Moore," she said, "I came here to look for a job. It's evident you need some one who can intelligently meet any prospective clients and as I am temporarily out of work I suggest that you hire me. It will relieve a serious difficulty."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Moore. "You say you want a job?"

"Absolutely!" And Nonita told of the events that brought her there.

"But I can't hire you. I haven't enough money," he protested.

"Nothing less than a partnership will do, Mr. Moore. I'll donate my services with what little money I have until—until we fail or succeed. There's nothing like taking a chance, and the reason why I came here is because I admired you for the big bluff you were running."

Moore blushed. He protested. "I can't let you take such a risk."

"It'll be a catastrophe for you if you don't. What I learned with Bixby will be valuable. How about it?"

He demurred at first, but when he realized what an asset Nonita would be to him, helpless as he was, he consented, and before the paint was dry on the door a feminine hand, steady and more artistic, had changed the sign to read:

MOORE & SAND

That addition was what the firm needed.

The next few days were devoted to getting the new establishment. With a capital more than double the original one the partners could well afford a table, another chair, a rug, several important-looking volumes and a desk set which gave the office a businesslike appearance. They had their sign painted on the directory down-stairs, but this time it was done by a professional, and they contracted for a notice in the want ad columns in several papers. So a week passed and no one came near them.

"We've got to do something," Nonita decided. "I suggest that as long as clients won't come to us you'll have to go and get them, Sebast." She was calling him by his rightful and uncontracted given name.

"But who shall I go to, Nonita?"

"I don't care—doctor, lawyer, merchant—the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker—it ought to be easy enough to hit one of your four million. But be sure and land a big one; pick some one with a large income and I'll do the plucking."

So it came to pass that Sebast went out seeking trade. But everywhere he went he met with rebuff. No one needed him. He

even dared to visit his former employer, Clute, and attempted to persuade him that he needed professional advice.

"Where'd you get the requisite knowledge?" Clute demanded.

"My partner, Sand," said Moore as if speaking of a man, "has studied the subject extensively and is very capable of handling accounts that require the utmost care and secrecy."

"Something wrong somewhere," commented Clute, ending the interview.

Moore was not disappointed. "I didn't expect to land him anyway," he told himself as he returned to the office and found Nonita conversing with a roughly dressed foreigner, who talked only in broken English. A moment later the stranger departed, and Nonita proudly displayed a five-dollar bill which she explained was the first money the company had earned.

"He saw our ad in the paper and I made out his return and charged him ten per cent. What luck with you?"

"None."

"Who'd you see?"

And Moore enumerated the scores of places he had visited, not forgetting to mention Clute.

"Scattered all over town," mused Nonita. "No system, Sebast. To-morrow you cover every office in this building; there's just as many prospects here as anywhere. Bixby, for instance; if we could get a ten-per-cent fee from him we'd have to pay a tax ourselves. Talk your head off to him and I'll 'tend to the unsolicited trade. Very shortly we'll have a regular business."

"Gee, you're optimistic, Nonita," said Moore. "I don't know how I'd get along without you and if—if—"

"This is no time for sentimental thoughts," interrupted Nonita, guessing what was on his mind. "I've got to pour over these corporation taxes, franchise taxes, and individual income taxes so that I'll be prepared for a real client if you ever stir one up. A big business with big people; that's what we've got to do."

"That's right, Nonita," said Moore absently. "You're boss."

"I've assumed those duties already, so don't forget seeing Bixby to-morrow."

When Moore returned at the end of the next day Nonita's first question was: "Did you see him?"

"That's all I did do," replied Moore.

"So you came away, I suppose?"

"What else could I do?" Moore queried.

Nonita didn't answer; instead she asked another question. "Was there any one there beside Bixby?"

"He seemed to be having some trouble with a girl."

At this Nonita smiled. "I thought so. I guess I'll have to go around and see him myself. He may want to hire me back."

"You don't mean it?" exclaimed Moore.

"Of course I do," she insisted.

"Well, I'm glad of that. I'm glad you've got sense enough to get out of this thing before it goes on the rocks. I'm grateful to you for what you've done and I'm sorry I can't repay you what you've put into it in time and money. If I thought for a minute that I could support a wife—"

"Cut that out! You misunderstand me, Sebast. I'm going to see Bixby to obtain his patronage. The day I quit I could have had anything I wanted, and now he's going to beg me to come back. Wait and see."

"More power to you," said Moore. "I wish you luck."

Nonita donned her hat and coat for the sake of appearance before entering Bixby's office.

He didn't seem surprised. "Aha," back for your old job?" he inquired most jovially.

"No, sir," she replied emphatically.

"I've come to prepare your income tax."

"So—so you're in with that young whippersnapper that came to see me."

"And you wouldn't listen to the sound business proposition he had to tell you," Nonita chided.

"And I won't listen to any tax talk from you, either," Mr. Bixby asserted stoutly. "You can have your job back and anything else you want if I can only get rid of that gum-chewing, putty-faced model of incompetence I've got now."

"Nothing doing, absolutely!" said Nonita, remembering that at one time Bixby could not tolerate her slang. "Now you listen to this money-saving proposition."

Bixby was helpless. He could growl and

scowl at a man and get rid of him, but with Nonita he usually submitted meekly.

She told Bixby the amount of the tax he had paid the year previous.

"How do you know?" he asked, admitting the figures were correct.

"Didn't I write a check that could have been raised to any amount by unscrupulous hands. You should have some device to protect your checks, but that is quite irrelevant. What I was going to say is that I can show you a perfectly legitimate and honest way of reducing your tax by a quarter. How does that sound?"

"Sounds all right," admitted Bixby. "But I don't believe it."

"Getting interested, though, aren't you?" she taunted. "If you'll just wait a minute I'll have the proof here."

She went to Bixby's phone and called up her own office across the hall. It would have been as easy to walk to it, but that would be not so impressive. Moore answered her.

"Busy?" she asked. "Well, when you get time bring over to Mr. Bixby's office those papers I have prepared. They're on the desk."

Moore took the hint that he was not to hurry. Bixby waited impatiently and repeated his offer to give Nonita her old job.

"I'm sorry," she replied. "But if things turn out right I expect I'll be married shortly."

Nonita considered it a rash statement as soon as she had made it. But then she was used to doing rash things.

"To—to your partner?" asked Bixby.

Nonita nodded. "Only he don't know it yet," she hastened to add.

For once in his life Bixby chuckled. Perhaps the remark had aroused some fond memory. Anyway when Moore entered the atmosphere had changed considerably since his last visit.

Nonita took the papers. "Now, listen, Mr. Bixby," she commanded and looked at Moore signifying that he was to do the same. "In the course of my work with you," she continued, "I could not help knowing that you personally possessed bonds of the Greenwich Railroad, Oaklawn Motors, and Clyde Oils, all yielding six per

cent or better. These constituted the greater portion of your taxable income. Now if you convert these bonds into some that are just as good security, but pay but four per cent and yet are not taxable your income will be proportionately reduced, but the absence of a tax will more than offset this reduction and you will be the gainer in the end. There!"

Nonita confidently finished her argument. Moore was astonished at her knowledge and Bixby was partially convinced. A few questions to which there were ready answers persuaded him that the plan was feasible.

"Then I'm engaged?" asked Nonita.

"You said so," answered Bixby, a twinkle in his eye.

"I mean are you going to let us prepare your return?" she asked, blushing.

"I guess it will be more profitable for me unless you charge exorbitant prices for your advice."

Moore was entirely out of the transaction. He didn't understand a bit of it and he was quite contented to let Nonita handle matters.

"I was coming to that," she said. "My plan will save you at least four thousand dollars a year and as our share I demand half. That's a lot, I know, but we need it."

Moore gasped. Bixby started to protest, but Nonita continued:

"Both parties will be two thousand to the good. Of course that sum doesn't mean much to you, Mr. Bixby, but it will insure us in running so serviceable a business a little while longer beside—"

And here she looked at Sebast, who stood open-mouthed in awe.

"I'll thank Mr. Bixby for the firm," she said. "And, Sebast," she asked, winking to Bixby, "wasn't there something you were going to say to me about supporting—"

"But not here," he stammered, and the two of them, who had so suddenly become one of the four million, linked arms and strode back to the door that Sebast insisted would be changed to read:

N. and S. MOORE

Some Man!

by Stephen Kaye

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE MERCY OF MORRELL.

WHEN Ella Richards, alias Barbara Alden, looked into Lane Hamlin's eyes that day in the McGrail office, she had seen enough to satisfy her. The light in Hamlin's eyes had been unmistakable. She had known then that Hamlin loved her. And though she had hoped for just such an expression in his gaze, she had been overcome with confusion when she saw it.

Late that same afternoon when Sayle came in, her face was flushed and her eyes were dancing with happiness.

Sayle eyed her keenly as he kissed her, noting her embarrassment.

"Hamlin has made his report, I reckon," he said, grinning.

She grasped his arms and held them tightly; he could feel her body trembling, the spasmodic twitching of the slender fingers on his arms.

"Oh, daddy, he loves me!" she whispered.

"H-m!" rumbled the pseudo Sayle. He gently disengaged his arms, seized the girl by the shoulders, and forced her back a little so that he could look into her eyes. What he saw there brought an astonished light into his own.

"How do you know? Did he tell you so?"

"Not in words, daddy; he *looked* it!"

"H-m! Looked it." He grinned widely. "Well, I reckon love *has* got a language that's a whole lot better than words. He *looked* it, eh? What about the veiled lady? Strikes me Hamlin's sort of scattering his affection some, isn't he? First he's

dead in love with a woman whose face he didn't see, and now he's in love with you. I'd be mighty-careful, Ella. It's likely he'll go right out and fall in love with some other woman."

"I'm not afraid of that!" she declared. "Why, daddy, his eyes were eloquent!"

"Bosh! Any man's eyes are eloquent to the woman who thinks he is in love with her."

"And, daddy—" She ignored his deprecating words, possibly because they were belied by the softness of his voice. "And, daddy," she repeated; "he is bashful!"

"Well," pondered Sayle, "I reckon he would be. That kind of a cuss always is. He'll be cold and steady and civil to me, and he'll fight with a grin on his face. But he's usually backward when he's around women. And he still thinks you are Barbara Alden."

"I believe I would have told him the truth if he had not left so—suddenly."

"He won't run away," consoled Sayle.

But it seemed to the girl that Hamlin had "run away." Each time the office door opened she turned toward it, expecting to see Hamlin, and at the end of two days she began to resent his absence. And if she had not been with her father when she saw Hamlin in the lobby of the Highland, she would have reproached him, she believed.

In her room, after kissing her father good night—the kiss that had aroused Hamlin's jealousy—she had gone to the dressing-table to look into the glass, there to note how the color had come into her face.

Of course Hamlin had brought it, as sight of him had brought the sparkle to the eyes that gazed back at her from the glass.

She had seen that Hamlin had been sur-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 19.

prised to see her enter the hotel; and she had likewise noted the wonder in his eyes, caused, she supposed by the fact that she was with Sayle.

That wonder of his had not disturbed her, though. On the contrary it gave her a pleasurable thrill to know that Hamlin had betrayed interest in her.

She spent some time looking into the glass, thinking of him. And when at last she turned, sighing a little, having some conception of the mental torture to which her entrance with Sayle had subjected Hamlin—and feeling just a bit sorry for him—she saw Morrell standing just inside the door.

She had not locked it, and Morrell had closed it behind him. She knew Morrell, for she had taken a good look at him in the Dragon just before Lane Hamlin had interfered with Morrell's advances.

The man's huge body seemed to fill the room. She felt dwarfed beside him. There was a cold grin on his pouting lips; his little black eyes were agleam with a humor that paralyzed her. She believed that she would have screamed for help, though, had she not seen a pistol of large caliber in his right hand, if he had not held up the left, the palm toward her. The pistol seemed to prove that he was determined to kill, if necessary—and her concern at the instant was for her father; while the left hand, with the palm toward her, seemed to be a sign offered to reassure her. Therefore, she stood silent, watching him.

"I don't mean to harm you, Miss Richards," he whispered. "If you keep quiet nobody will ever know I've been in here. But if you make a noise, bringin' that guy, Sayle, in here, I'll kill both of you! I just want to have a little talk with you, an' then I'll beat it."

She did not answer. His manner was insincere; there seemed to be a stealthy threat in the expression of his gleaming black eyes in the way he moved as he stepped toward her.

"It ain't nothin' to get scared over," he whispered as he moved across the room; "not if you don't go to gettin' loud an' bringin' some one to interfere." He lowered the left hand and fumbled at a pocket,

bringing forth a sheet of soiled paper, which he extended toward her.

"I reckon it's just justice I'm after, Miss Richards," he said in a placative voice; "justice, that's all. This here paper is a copy of a will that your mother made. I want you to take a look at it."

Half convinced that the man intended no harm to her, Miss Richards reached out a hand to receive the paper he was holding out. The next instant a huge hand went over her mouth. She was swung off her feet and carried to the door.

She fought with the man, frenziedly kicking at him as he held her, until her strength gave out. He had bent her arms back, holding them tightly against her sides, and the big hand over her mouth and nose shut off her breath completely. She could see Morrell's face near hers—he was peering close at her, apparently enjoying her struggles to breathe.

But the hand continued to press—harder, harder—seeming to become gigantic, an implacable, remorseless instrument of death. Her lungs were shot with agonizing pains; lights, varicolored, began to streak across her vision; the room started to whirl in sickening convolutions. And then came a terrible, overpowering darkness.

Aeons of time seemed to have passed when Miss Richards again opened her eyes, to realize that she was gasping breath into her aching lungs. It had seemed to her that some monstrous object had been resting on her head, crushing her down and down into a place where space was black and endless. Then after a while she seemed to be released and myriad lights began to dance before her eyes. Her last sensation before awakening was that she was being relieved of a terrific constriction at her throat. She struggled and sat up, to see Morrell bending over her.

He was grinning hugely, triumphantly. But there seemed to be no immediate threat in his manner, and oddly, she was not so much afraid of him as she had been when he had confronted her in her room at the hotel.

Her first glance told her that she was no longer in her room, but in a strange one. She was seated on a huge, overstuffed tap-

estry davenport, and she saw at her side a big red handkerchief which, she decided, must have been tied over her mouth. She noted one door—closed, and a window at her right. The window evidently opened upon a small air court, and there were stout iron bars set into the frame. She could see a dirty red brick wall that rose within a foot of the window.

The room had a high ceiling, and blank, bare walls, whose decorations had become dingy with neglect. It was evident, though, that at one time the room had been pretentious as to luxury, for the character of the furnishings indicated artistic sense and wealth.

There were massive bronzes, plaques, marble statuettes, paintings. An ornate clock, its hands stationary at three, decorated a wide mantel. Bronze andirons and a filmy screen partially concealed the gaping fireplace. A huge bookcase almost filled one end of the room. A heavy library-table with big, carved legs was in the center. There were massive chairs, a faded Persian rug; lamps of Oriental design. Miss Richards saw a many branched candlestick which seemed to stand in an ancient atmosphere. There was a brass urn on a pedestal. An obese jardinier squatted in a corner.

Yet, despite the decorations, the room seemed like a prison. The one door and the solitary window hinted of secrecy, of stealth, of sinister, clandestine prowling. The girl sat there holding her throat, automatically and involuntarily rubbing it as though to disperse the pain of her breathing, trembling—her eyes closing, opening, filled with awed wonder and dismay.

At a little distance sat Morrell, in a big chair, watching her. His little eyes were narrowed with a gloating triumph. His lips were extended, drooping—loose with a bestial joy.

"Why did you bring me here?"

The girl's voice came with an effort, and yet she looked steadily at Morrell.

"Clever, eh?" laughed Morrell. "You're here, all right. You thought you'd fooled me the other night—fixin' your maid up to look like you. Well, you pretty near tricked me—but not quite. I guzzled that maid

until her tongue stuck out a yard before I caught on that she wasn't you. I saw you comin' down-stairs afterward—when that damned Hamlin busted in. Look here."

He showed her a spot on his jaw where the skin was broken, the flesh around it discolored. He pointed to his left eye, which was swollen, and discolored, like the flesh on his jaw. He showed her his lips—they were puffed, the flesh split inside. He shoved back his hat and pointed to a huge bump on his forehead.

He grinned malevolently, with hideous mirth.

"Hamlin done it. I'm goin' to kill Hamlin. Wait. I'll get him, too."

Morrell got up and paced back and forth. His huge muscles were in rigid bunches, the bruised lips were stuck out; his big hands opened and closed and the girl shrank at the terrible strength of them. This man, she felt, was a mental and moral pervert—an atavism. His passions were malignant, ruthless. He had no sense of balance or of values; he was an animal, with the ferocious impulses and instincts of his kind.

And yet she detected in him a certain ability of repression. He had the cunning of an animal, in that he could wait, biding his time until he held the advantage.

"You've been right foxy—eh?" he went on, halting before her and grinning down into her upturned face. "Palmin' your maid off as you, an' workin' in a detective's office.

"But I've watched you. That night Hamlin clawed me I went back to your house. I saw you go out, an' I followed you. You took a taxi an' I took another. I seen you go into the Highland. I got Frayne to find out where your room was."

"An' Frayne got that Larrabee girl out again, last night. He got her to talkin', an' she told him you was workin' in a detective's office. But she couldn't tell Frayne anything about where your dad is."

"How did you bring me here—and where am I?" questioned Miss Richards, her curiosity overcoming her dread and fear of the man.

"That's easy," he laughed. "A friend of Frayne's runs the freight elevator in the

Highland. When I carried you out of your room, after chloroforming you, I beat it straight for his car, which was waitin' for me. I got you into the basement, and then to a private automobile, which I had waitin'. Then I brought you here."

"Where is 'here'?"

Morrell grinned. He turned, and walked the length of the room. As he presented his back, Miss Richards ran to the door. Morrell heard her as she tried to pull the door open, and instead of attempting to interfere he stood, grinning at her efforts.

"No use," he mocked. "It's locked—plenty. The 'window, too. Feel like screaming? Well, go to it. Nobody will hear you. This is an old building, an' there's no one else in it. An' you're a half a block from any street. You might as well save your breath."

Miss Richards slowly returned to the davenport and sat upon it. The terror that gripped her was visible—it was a nameless thing that clutched her in an icy grasp, making her lips bloodless and her eyes big pools of haunting dread.

"What are you keeping me here for? What do you intend doing?" she managed, after a time, during which Morrell stood at a distance, watching her.

"I'll kill you—mebbe. Mebbe I won't," he answered, laughing softly, as though the situation was not without humor. "I've intended to kill you right along. I went to your house that night to do for you. But I've been usin' nry brain-box since."

He now walked close to her. A quick change came over him. His face was poisonously bloated and repulsive with a sudden passion that seemed to seize him.

"The money you've got ain't yours—not a damned cent of it. It's mine! It's money that was made by my father, Link Morrell, before I was born, an' while Morrell was livin' with my mother. I'm goin' to have it!"

"You mean the money left to me by my mother, I suppose?"

"That's it."

"You have no claim upon that money—legal or moral. It is money that came to my mother after the death of your father."

"Who was tellin' you?"

"Mr. Lawson told me—and my father."

"They tell you who killed my dad, Link Morrell?"

She nodded.

"I figured it this way," he said, watching her, hatred lying naked in his eyes. "Lawton, Richards, an' Lane Hamlin's dad framed up to beat my dad out of his share of the mine. I've heard they was ag'in' my dad from the first, an' when they found gold they downed him—Hamlin's dad doin' the killin'."

"They done it to keep my mother from gettin' what was comin' to her. After Richards married your mother they turned my dad's share over to her."

"That isn't the truth. Lawton told me he and the others bought your father's interest in the mine more than a year before your father's death."

She met the cold hatred of Morrell's eyes steadily.

"Bah!" he jeered. "Lies—eh? Well, they've framed 'em up. That's a story to tell to them that want to believe it. I don't believe it, an' I'm intendin' to have what's coming to me."

Miss Richards had been watching Morrell closely, studying him. And, observing how his muscles twitched, and how his eyes dilated, revealing the malevolent passions that ruled him, she decided that her life was of more value to her than the wealth he claimed.

She had been convinced by Lawton that Morrell had no claim to the money; and in the office with Lawton that day she had felt secure, hedged about as she was, by the law and the protection of her friends. At that time, though, she had experienced an impulse of pity for Morrell, and the wealth that had been bequeathed to her by her mother had immediately lost some of its value in her eyes. She had said nothing to Lawton concerning the state of her feelings, but there had lurked in her heart since that day a conviction that Morrell did have a moral claim upon her; and she had meant to ask her father's consent to a settlement with the man.

She had delayed, though, not believing Morrell would carry out the threat Hamlin had overheard him make to Seeley Gray,

and thinking that the matter could be settled through the proper channels—in a businesslike manner. Now, however, with her life in jeopardy, with Morrell's blazing, hate-inflamed eyes upon her, she realized that she must act.

"You may have the money you think belongs to you," she said.

"How do you figure to turn it over to me?"

He was watching her narrowly, suspiciously.

"Why," she said hesitatingly; "we'll go to see father. The transfer can be made right away."

"How long will it take?"

"Only a few minutes. Father will give you a check for the amount."

She was about to say more concerning the legal points that would have to be adjusted when Morrell astonished her by grinning at her in huge triumph.

"So your dad ain't in Europe after all!" he said. "You could settle this thing in a few minutes; an' your dad could give me a check—eh? Then he's in town, an' livin' mighty close. Bah!" he jeered. "You thought you'd fool me again, eh? Get me where the cops would nail me, eh? Pretend to agree an' then double-cross me. You got another guess comin'."

He leaned over her; his breath in her face, and she got up, shrinking from the threat in his manner, backing away from him, realizing with dismay that he had tricked her.

He followed her, grinning bestially, seeming to delight in the terror he aroused in her.

"Your dad's in town, eh? An' right close—where you can reach him in a few minutes. Well, Seeley Gray wants him. An' I want him. When I get the both of you together we'll settle this thing for good. An' you're tellin' me where I can find him, or I'll choke the life out of you!"

She tried to evade him, stumbled on the rug, felt his big hands grip her shoulders; saw his repulsive eyes glow with a lust that she had never seen in any man's eyes. For an instant she wildly thought of defying him, but there was no mistaking the deadly earnestness of him. And when he

brought the other hand up, and slipped both to her throat, his sinewy fingers touching the flesh with what seemed to her to be a tentative pressure, promising instant brutality, she gasped:

"Don't, Morrell; I'll tell you!"

"All right," he grinned; "shoot!"

She told him, and he regarded her fixedly, the muscles of the fingers at her throat stiffening.

"Sayle?" he said. "By God! Yes—so he is!"

He released her and backed away, exultant, grinning craftily; while she, now that the hideous menace of his presence was for the instant removed, retreated to the wall near a pedestal, upon which stood a small marble statuette, determined, if he again approached her, to hit him with the ornament. For she knew now that what she had seen in his eyes was a lust to kill.

She watched him, rigid, breathing fast, her right hand resting on the statuette, while for an instant he grinned at her. Then he turned and walked to the door, unlocking it.

"Sayle," he said. "I'll get him—an' Hamlin. Then I'll come back here an' take care of you!"

He closed the door, locked it from the outside. It opened into a hall; she saw the walls, the stairs. Then she heard him fussing about in the hall; heard a scraping noise as if bars being set into place. And then she heard his step on the stairs—a sound that gradually receded until it ceased.

She dragged a chair below the window and examined the iron bars. By pressing her cheek against them she could look into the court into which the window opened. It was not more than two feet wide, and seemed to consist of a solid brick wall. She could see no other windows in it, above or below.

She got the bronze tongs from the fireplace and broke the glass of the window. And, standing on the chair, she screamed, hoping the sound would attract the attention of some one—she did not care whom. It seemed to her that her voice should be heard, for it resounded with force in the room and in the little court.

But there came no response. At the end of an hour she tried again, and the silence

that followed her efforts was so deep and awesome that she shrank from it. And at last, convinced of the futility of attempting to escape, she huddled down upon the davenport and hid her face in her hands.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PRIMITIVE ACTION.

HAMLIN was pale with the fury of bafflement when, after searching the halls and still finding no trace of Miss Alden, he ran to his room, unlocked the door with the key that he had fortunately dropped into a pocket when entering some time before, got his hat and stepped into an elevator which rose to his floor in response to his violent ringing.

The uniformed operator looked sharply at him while replying to his question as to whether a man and woman had descended a few minutes before.

"Nobody's gone down in the last hour, sir."

Then Morrell must have taken the stairs, Hamlin decided, for the second elevator was not running. When Hamlin reached the street floor he saw the other car standing idle, the door closed, the lights out.

Hamlin walked to the desk. The night clerk smiled at him with good-natured, if cynical, weariness when Hamlin asked him if a man and a woman had gone out within the past few minutes. The clerk accomplished a slow negative while frankly inspecting Hamlin's face.

"You would have seen them, of course?"

"Undoubtedly," with a suspicion of mockery.

"The stairs, perhaps?" persisted Hamlin.

"Perhaps—perhaps not," smiled the clerk.

He turned from Hamlin to the jangle of the telephone-bell. The wearied, tolerant, good-natured expression left his face and was superseded by keen, alert interest as he held the receiver to his ear.

"Just a minute, please!" he said crisply.

"Don't get excited. What has happened?" There was a short pause, during which Hamlin heard a voice on the wire. How-

ever, he did not wait. He heard the clerk gasp: "Impossible!" as he dashed out the front door; he saw two bell-boys run to the desk and stand there alert, attentive, as he darted to the curb where a taxi-driver was leaning against the hood of his car.

"Which way did they go?" demanded Hamlin.

"Who, sir?" The driver blinked in seeming incomprehension.

"Man and woman!" snapped Hamlin. "Five minutes ago. Big, dark man—little woman!"

The driver's face crinkled into a grin, which vanished when he got a good look at Hamlin's eyes.

"I've seen no one come out within the last half-hour, sir," he answered.

Hamlin turned without comment and walked toward Fifth Avenue. After taking a few steps he broke into a run, which brought him quickly to the corner. Of course the taxi-driver had been asleep, or otherwise unalert, or he must have seen Morrell and Miss Alden. And of course since they had not taken the elevator down, they must have descended the stairs. In that event—if they had not taken a taxi within a short distance of the hotel—they could not have gone very far. For Miss Alden would have to be carried.

There were a few pedestrians on Fifth Avenue in the vicinity of the corner where Hamlin halted, but there was no sign of Morrell. After a swift glance up and down the famous thoroughfare Hamlin turned back. He crossed the street, ran rapidly down it and emerged upon Broadway. And there, instantly, he sensed the futility of further search.

He paused for an instant at the corner, debating an impulse to return to the hotel and question Sayle, but decided that a talk with the latter would probably end in his punching the other's head. And that would mean trouble with the police—which he wanted to avoid.

For the first time in his life he had some conception of what a baffling and monstrous task it was to find one person among several millions. He felt like an atom in a world of space—an atom endowed with perceptions of direction, but still unable

to determine which direction to take. He could not apply to the police, for that would mean discovery and arrest; and restriction of his liberty at this time would mean that perhaps Miss Alden would never be found.

He had started to move again, conscious of the interrogative glance of an officer who was standing at a little distance from him, when he thought of Lawton. He crossed the street, stepped into a cigar-store, bought a cigar, lighted it, and after receiving his change strode into a telephone-booth and closed the door.

He got Lawton's number, and after a while Lawton's voice answered gruffly:

"Hello. This is John Lawton. Lane—eh?" he growled when apprized of the identity of the other. "Well, what in hell do you mean by getting a man out of bed at this time of night?"

"Shut up!" admonished Hamlin. "Now, listen to what I have to say. Miss Alden has been abducted—by Luther Morrell. I don't know what it means—"

Profanity leaped over the wire and crashed into Hamlin's ear. Then a question roared at him:

"How long ago?"

"Ten minutes."

More electric profanity. Then in raging disgust:

"Where in hell was Sayle?"

"Damn Sayle!"

"Eh? What's that you say? Damn Sayle? What the devil do you mean?"

"Sayle's a rake; a damned libertine. I saw Miss Alden struggling with Morrell from my window across the light court. I went over there, jumped into Miss Alden's window. Got there too late. Miss Alden and Morrell had gone. I broke down the door between Miss Alden's room and Sayle's, in order to get out into the hall to get at Morrell. Sayle wanted to shoot me. I walloped him—"

"You hit Sayle?" came in a gasp over the wire.

"Good and plenty!" retorted Hamlin grimly. "I'll wallop him again when I meet him. It's the old game of pretended fatherliness, Lawton. Sayle had taken two rooms at the Highland. He tried to make a fool of Miss Alden. But she wouldn't

stand for it. It wasn't her fault, remember. From my window I saw Sayle kiss her. It was a fatherly kiss, you understand? Then the damned scoundrel—"

"You hit Sayle?" came over the wire again in a suffocated, incredulous voice.

"I ought to have killed him."

"Lane, you've made a mistake. You—"

"Lawton, you make me tired. A man can't—"

"Lane, you're a wild man. You don't stop to reason about—"

"Lawton, this isn't the time for one of your damned sermons. I want you to notify the police about Miss Alden's abduction. I can't do it myself. Hustle!"

A blast of incoherence smote Hamlin's ears, from which Hamlin caught the words: "Richards," "Sayle," "Barbara Alden" and "fool" and "damned idiot." But there seemed to be no sequence or sense to Lawton's explosive verbal tornado; and Hamlin viciously jammed the receiver on the hook and walked rapidly down Broadway.

Hamlin did not walk far. As on the night in the Dragon his lips were set in a cold grin. And there was in his heart a longing for swift, violent physical action. He had hated Morrell before, but that hatred had been merely an intensified dislike—the passion that takes offense at a man's personal appearance, and which deals merely in a desire to avoid contact with him, if possible. But the passion which boiled in Hamlin's veins at this minute struck deeper than that. It was hatred of a primitive kind; the hatred of a man of strong character for another who has despoiled him of his mate.

And that passion to a man of Hamlin's temperament could lead only to one thing. And upon that one thing Hamlin's thoughts centered as he hailed a taxi and got into it. And into his mind as he rode there flashed a mental picture. He could see a crude town in the West, set down in the center of desolation. In front of a little frame building stood a man, and in front of him were two other men. An oppressive quiet reigned; there was no motion. Hamlin could see the huddled shanties of the town; the deep dust of the street, and the shimmering sunlight that flooded the place.

But more plainly than anything else, he could see the man who stood in front of the little frame building. The man was his father, of course, and the mental picture he was seeing had been drawn from Lawton's description of the scene. But it seemed to Hamlin as he looked at the picture that by some magic he was occupying his father's position—that it was he who confronted the two men, and that within him raged the cold passion that had gripped his father at that instant.

The passion was the same, at least, only the surroundings were different. Man is man whether he rides in a taxi on Broadway or bestrides a horse on the plains.

A short ride brought Hamlin to the curb in front of the Richards residence. He dismissed the driver, ran up the steps and rang the door-bell.

Labrue answered. He grinned genially as Hamlin made himself known, stepping aside to permit him to enter.

"Miss Richards isn't in, sir," he volunteered.

"I came to see Miss Larrabie." He noted Labrue's astonished expression, adding quickly: "It is important, Labrue; I've got to see her!"

"Go right up," directed Labrue. "Third floor. Her room is at the rear—left. She's getting ready to go out."

Hamlin ascended the stairs. On the third floor he passed down the hall, pausing before the door to which Labrue had directed him. In answer to his knock a feminine voice answered:

"What is it?"

"A messenger, Miss Larrabie."

"Come in," directed the voice. The door swung open and Hamlin entered.

The room was of the character usually occupied by servants. It was plain, neat, clean. Various garments belonging to Miss Larrabie were scattered about, as though she had discarded them for the street attire she now wore, not yet putting them away.

Miss Larrabie was dressed as she had been on the night Hamlin had seen her in the Dragon. Her cheeks had been touched with rouge and amply powdered; her eyes were bright and glowing with a rather bold interest as she looked at Hamlin.

Hamlin still wore the racy clothing he had donned in the McGrail offices; the stain was still on his face, and the dark glasses with their grotesque rims. He saw that Miss Larrabie did not recognize him.

"Well?" she inquired as Hamlin closed the door.

Hamlin drew his coat aside and exposed the glittering badge Miss Alden had given him. The movement was rapid, and Miss Larrabie did not have time to inspect the words stamped on the metal. In fact, a swift glance at the badge brought a startling change in her. Her face paled under the powder and the rouge; she took a step backward, clasped her hands and sat down on the edge of the bed, opening her mouth to permit the ejaculation, "My Gawd!" to come from them. And then she seemed to sag as she relapsed into silence and stared at Hamlin.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Larrabie." Hamlin's smile carried some reassurance for the girl, even though there was a grim quality to it that hinted of determination.

"I've come here to talk with you about Frayne and Morrell. What do you know about them?"

"My Gawd!" breathed Miss Larrabie again. "A fly cop! I give you my word, mister, that I don't know anything about them. Not a thing."

"Be careful, Miss Larrabie. You were seen in the Dragon with Morrell and Frayne the night Miss Richards was there."

"I don't deny it." The color was coming back into her face, and a glint of defiance lay in her eyes.

"Sure—I was with both of the gentlemen. I'd gone there with Mr. Frayne. A girl has to have some pleasure. And what harm was there in going? Miss Richards had no business butting in—trying to break up our party. The nerve of some people!"

"Well, you are in trouble, Miss Larrabie," quietly warned Hamlin, merely to restore to the girl a sense of respect for the law he was supposed to represent. "Both Frayne and Morrell are wanted by the police, for—for several jobs. We're going to get them, and if you don't talk pretty lively, and do exactly as I say, we'll have to hold you as an accomplice."

"I'll say I'll talk!" declared Miss Larrabie, her face whitening again. "My Gawd!" she breathed once more, evidently afflicted with a realization of the narrowness of her escape from the meshes of the law of which she stood in dread.

"How did you become acquainted with Frayne?"

"How does any girl get acquainted with a man?" demanded Miss Larrabie in some astonishment. "I passed him on the street one night. I gave him the 'up and down' and he fell for it immediately. I hadn't been talking to him more than five minutes before he was hipped for fair." Miss Larrabie evidently took some pride in her achievement, for she smiled fatuously.

Hamlin's interest was not in the progress of Miss Larrabie's conquest of Frayne; he wanted to know where he could find the man.

"All right," he said. "I don't wonder that Frayne fell in love with you. But Frayne is a crook, and I'm after him. You've got a chance to escape a prison sentence by telling me where I can find Frayne.—to-night."

Miss Larrabie sighed—it was a tremulous effort, and it evidently hurt her to betray the man who had been so romantically attracted to her. But there was no doubt that a vision of a dark cell in the Tombs was disturbing.

"I hate to throw a fellow down, Mr. Cop," she said. "But I give you my word I didn't know he was a crook. I suppose I've gotta tell?"

"Tell or go to jail."

"Well," she said resignedly; "I'll tell what I know. It ain't much. I've never been to Frayne's rooms—though he's asked me. So I don't know where he lives. I've been meeting him when I could get away. I've got a date with him to-night at the corner."

"It's rather late for a date, isn't it?" Hamlin looked at his watch; the time was shortly after one.

Miss Larrabie blushed. "We was going to an all-night joint for supper," she explained.

Hamlin asked her when she intended to meet Frayne, and when she replied that she

was "due" now, he opened the door and motioned for her to follow him. She did so, hesitatingly, and in the hall Hamlin halted.

"I'll go with you as far as the corner, Miss Larrabie. We'll meet Frayne. You've got a home, I suppose?"

"I stay at my mother's when I want to."

"Well, after we meet Frayne, you see how fast you can get to your mother's. And don't come back here—even for your clothes. Send for them. If you come back I'll pinch you. Do you understand?"

Evidently Miss Larrabie understood. She nodded a vigorous affirmative. She followed Hamlin down-stairs, and stood near the door, looking out, while Hamlin talked with Labrue.

Hamlin explained to the latter that he was abroad upon service which concerned Miss Richards; and when he mentioned Frayne, Labrue's eyes kindled.

"That's the guy that's been hangin' around here for the past two or three weeks," he said. "He's been watchin' the house for that Seeley Gray bunch, Miss Richards said. I'd like to herdride the scum."

"That's a task I have reserved for myself, Labrue," grinned Hamlin. "After I get him in here, you just see that we are not interrupted."

Labrue smiled broadly. An instant later Hamlin and Miss Larrabie were walking down the steps. At the corner they encountered Frayne. The latter betrayed some hesitation in approaching Miss Larrabie, evidently regarding Hamlin as a rival for his place in the lady's affections; but when she, having apparently become convinced that she must betray her Samson into the hands of the law's minion, walked straight toward him, he grinned and came forward, shooting an interrogative glance at Hamlin.

The latter was in no mood for delay or subterfuge. He had seen that the street was deserted; and when Frayne came close to Miss Larrabie, looking at her inquiringly, as though he expected her to introduce him to her friend, he struck viciously. The blow landed on the point of Frayne's jaw.

Frayne's legs sagged, he stumbled for-

ward into an uppercut that snapped his head back as though it were hinged to his shoulders. He went down, soundlessly, a crumpled heap on the sidewalk.

Miss Larrabie smothered a surprised "Oh, Gawd!" and then stood speechless while Hamlin lifted Frayne to his shoulders.

"Now get away from here, Miss Larrabie. And remember—don't come back. And keep your mouth shut!"

When Hamlin, carrying Frayne, reached the steps of the Richards residence, he saw Miss Larrabie walking rapidly away, looking back over her shoulder.

"Get him," grinned Hamlin as Labrue opened the door.

"An' a damn good job," said Labrue, vindictively. "I'd have made that guy look like a colander if I could have got Miss Richards to say the word. He's a friend of that damned Luther Morrell, whose dad your father downed out near Lanon."

Hamlin carried Frayne up-stairs to Miss Larrabie's room. From what Lawton had told him about Labrue, and from what he knew of the man from talking with him, he knew there would be no interference.

He carried Frayne into the room and dropped him upon the bed, amidst the litter of Miss Larrabie's discarded clothing. The man was showing signs of regaining consciousness—his eyelids were fluttering, his muscles twitching; he rolled his head from side to side in an effort to clear his befogged brain.

Hamlin locked the door and stood with his back to it, watching Frayne with a grin in which there was no mirth. And after a while Frayne made an effort to sit up, succeeded, and sat on the edge of the bed swaying from side to side, blinking at objects in the room.

He grew steadier after a few minutes; and then he seemed to see Hamlin for the first time. He stared perplexedly for a short interval, during which he felt of his jaw, where Hamlin's fist had landed. Then his face bloated with resentment.

"What in hell did you hit me for?" he demanded belligerently. Not waiting for an answer, he reached for a hip-pocket. Simultaneously, Hamlin was on top of him, grasping the hand as it neared the pocket,

twisting it until Frayne whined in agony. When Frayne turned his body to escape a broken arm, Hamlin's hand sought the man's hip-pocket, bringing out a pistol of heavy caliber, which he eyed contemptuously for an instant and then threw into a corner.

Frayne, holding his arm, watched Hamlin dispose of the gun. He was a slender man, lithe, sinewy. On the night of his experience in the Dragon, Hamlin had looked once at Frayne, mentally determining him to be a rather colorless individual who lacked initiative. He saw now that Frayne was more dangerous than he had thought.

"Frayne," he said, "get up."

Frayne got unsteadily to his feet, watching Hamlin with a shadow of fear in his ferretlike eyes. It was plain that he thought Hamlin was going to explain the attack on him, and his action in bringing him to the room.

But no explanation came. Hamlin intended to make none.

"Frayne," he said again; "I'm Lane Hamlin—the man you met in the Dragon the other night."

Frayne started; then leaned forward and looked long and hard at Hamlin. The light of recognition began to glow in his eyes, and with it a shrinking fear.

"You know me, eh?"

Frayne's manner indicated that he did. He tried to take a step backward, but the bed prevented. So he stood silent, watching Hamlin.

"Frayne," said Hamlin, "where did Morrell take Barbara Alden?"

Frayne sneered. "What in hell do I know about it?" he muttered.

He tried to move sidewise, evidently divining from the flame in Hamlin's eyes that physical punishment for the lie was imminent. He was too slow. Hamlin's blow traveled faster than he anticipated. The fist landed with crushing force on Frayne's jaw, at a point which was already bruised; and he tumbled back upon the bed, groaning, half unconscious.

When he finally got up again, it was to see that Hamlin had taken his coat off. He was placing the garment over the back of a

chair, and he tossed his hat upon the top of a dresser. His movements were deliberate, and there was a thrust to his jaw that unmistakably advertised his intention.

Frayne got up. There was a wild light in his eyes, his face was ghastly.

"What are you goin' to do, damn you?"

Frayne's voice betrayed the terror that gripped him. As Hamlin again approached him he backed away—this time down along the foot of the bed. He reached the farther side and brought up against the wall. There he halted, and involuntarily threw his hands into a defensive position.

Hamlin had followed him closely; with a grin on his face which should have told Frayne that Hamlin meant to have an answer to his question.

As Hamlin got close enough to strike his lips moved.

"Frayne, where did Morrell take Barbara Alden?"

"Damn you!" shrieked Frayne. "I don't know!"

With his lips still in a grin, Hamlin struck again. Frayne's head hit the wall with a resounding thump. He slid downward, landing in a sitting posture, his back against the wall. His head was wobbling, his lips were drooling blood where the blow had landed. His eyes were glazed and he placed his hands on the floor beside him to steady himself.

After an interval of silence he felt Hamlin's fingers sink into his shoulders. He was lifted, until his feet were under him and he was standing, his back against the wall—Hamlin holding him in that position.

Hamlin's voice, icy and passionless, reached his befuddled senses.

"Frayne; I'm going to keep asking you that question until you answer it. You and Morrell have been working together. You know where Morrell took Barbara Alden. You're going to tell me. More—you're going to take me where Barbara Alden is. Perhaps I am mistaken in thinking that you know where Morrell took her; but I'm going to take a chance on that. Whenever you feel that you have received punishment enough you can tell me. I'm asking you again: Where did Morrell take Barbara Alden?"

"Damn you; I don't know!" screamed Frayne.

Heavily, almost passionately, it seemed, Hamlin struck once more. This time Frayne collapsed on the floor near the wall, and lay there, groaning.

And Hamlin, feeling that the wretch knew the truth and was determined not to tell, stood near him, his arms folded, waiting for Frayne to rise, so that he could again ask the question he had asked before.

At this moment Hamlin was conscious of no nice scruples regarding this inquisition. He could not appeal to the law, for he was outlawed. The situation in which he found himself had narrowed down to the necessity for primitive action. Frayne was receiving no more damage than was being inflicted at this instant upon Barbara Alden—in Morrell's clutches, enduring the ignominy of his hateful presence, forced against her will to submit to—at the least—confinement at the hands of a man who was governed by the instincts and passions of an animal.

CHAPTER XIX.

CARDS ON THE TABLE.

JAY RICHARDS, alias Sayle, had been trained in a rough school, where he had been compelled to receive blows, both physical and mental, to which a man of less constitutional vigor would have succumbed. But never in his life had he been hit as hard as Hamlin had hit him. He had not seen Hamlin's face, and therefore he did not know who his assailant was. He only knew that when he had been awakened by the wrecking of the door between his room and his daughter's, he had seen a man come through the opening, to bring up with a crash against the foot of his bed.

In Richards's day, in the old West, a gun in a man's hand had been the magic which commanded respect; and when he had seized it from beneath his pillow he had expected awe from the intruder. Instead, he had got action—swift, terrific.

When he regained consciousness he was lying flat on his back on the bed. He sat up, feeling his jaw, and wondering what had happened to him. Then he saw the pis-

tol lying beside him, the moonlight glittering on the metal; and recollection of what had occurred instantly came back to him.

He clambered out of bed, ran to his daughter's room; noted that she was not there and that her bed had not been occupied—and leaped to the telephone to apprise the clerk of what had happened.

He dressed hurriedly, still dazed from the effects of the blow. But his jaws were clamped with passion, cold and vicious.

His first thought had been that Morrell was the man who had struck him, though upon that point he could not be certain, for it had seemed to him that the intruder had been a smaller man than Morrell. However, he was convinced that Morrell was somehow connected with the outrage. He believed that in some way Morrell had discovered where he and his daughter were staying, and had abducted the girl, following out his idea of securing the vengeance he had sworn to obtain.

After dressing, Richards picked up the pistol, examined it, and stuck it into a hip-pocket. He had started toward the door when the telephone-bell jangled shrilly. He took up the receiver, to be greeted by Lawton's gruff voice:

"Hello—Jay Richards?" And after being assured that Richards was listening, he went on: "What in the devil is wrong?"

Richards told him; and Lawton's voice grew chill.

"Lane Hamlin just called me up—from somewhere. I couldn't get the damned idiot to listen to me—he cut me off. I'm dressed, and I'll be with you in fifteen minutes. Don't say a word about the affair to anybody until I get there!"

However, Richards was impatient. He called the hotel clerk, and to his inquiries the latter replied that he was certain Miss Alden had not gone out.

Had any other person gone out?

Yes; a man who had registered two days before as John Hammond. Hammond had asked the same question Mr. Sayle was asking. The clerk wondered about Mr. Hammond's interest. Should the police be notified?

"Very well," he answered to Richards's abrupt negative.

Richards jammed the receiver back on the hook.

Hammond! Richards's eyes gleamed with speculation. The man who had struck him *had* looked like Hammond—Lane Hamlin. Richards was convinced that no other man in the world could hit like that.

But Hamlin would not abduct his daughter. That supposition was ridiculous. Richards endured twenty minutes of torturing impatience, at the end of which the telephone-bell rang again.

"Mr. Lawton is calling," the desk informed him.

A few minutes later Lawton entered. After a swift examination of the rooms, Lawton related what Hamlin had told him over the telephone some time before. He pointed to the open window—one of the curtains was torn.

"That's where Lane got in," said Lawton. "It's too damned bad he couldn't have made it in time to head Morrell off."

"Bah!" sneered Richards vindictively. "Lane Hamlin is an idiot—a strong-armed young fool!"

"Complimentary, eh?" Lawton's grin was grim. "He said something of the kind about you. Called you a 'rake,' a libertine, and some other pretty names. Said he'd walloped you—plenty; and intended to do it again. That's what comes of not telling him the truth."

"Blame that on Ella," growled Richards. "I wanted to tell him, but she wouldn't have it. Some damned nonsense about her wanting him to fall in love with her—for herself. Now it's happened. I ought to have put Morrell away long ago. I kept thinking he was bluffing. I'm going to put the police on this thing, Lawton, before Morrell—" His voice grew thick. "Lawton, if Morrell harms a hair of her pretty head I'll kill him sure as hell!"

"Wait." Lawton's voice was cold, steady. It was plain that he did not intend to yield to the sort of panic that was threatening Richards.

"We'll play one string out before we tackle another," he declared. "I'm going to rely some on Lane Hamlin. He loves your girl, Richards—even if he don't know her real name—and you can gamble he ain't

going to sit down and chew his finger-nails while Morrell's got her. We'll go and see Gray. You remember Lane said Morrell was at Gray's house when Lane went there as Hammond?"

"That means waiting until morning," objected Richards. "I can't stand it, Lawton!"

"Steady, Richards; you've got to. Don't put the police on the case now. They can't do a thing. Anyway, it's after one o'clock now, and a delay of four or five hours won't matter much."

"Morrell will kill her before that," declared Richards. His face was drawn and seamed with new lines and wrinkles, and his eyes were filled with a haunting anxiety.

"Morrell would have killed her right in this room if he had meant murder," said Lawton. "Carrying her away means that he's got something else on his miserable mind."

For an hour the two men sat there, staring at each other. Then Lawton, noting Richards's growing impatience, suggested taking a walk. They went down into the streets and walked until the dawn came. Then they returned to the Highland and asked if John Hammond had returned.

The clerk shook his head, watching them perplexedly as they sought chairs in the lobby and waited, their faces turned toward the door.

When the streets began to clatter with early morning traffic Richards got up from his chair.

"I've stood it as long as I can, Lawton," he said. "I'm going to see Seeley Gray."

They climbed into a taxi at the doors of the hotel and were whisked to the curb in front of Gray's residence. Lawton, tacitly taking the initiative, ordered the driver to wait and led the way up the steps to the door.

They waited for some time before their ring was answered, and when a servant appeared Lawton gave him a card, directing him to say to Gray that Mr. Lawton must see him immediately. The servant soon returned and ushered Lawton and Richards up-stairs.

Gray was fully dressed, though it was apparent that the final touches had been hurried, for his tie was a trifle awry, his hair ruffled; and when Lawton and Richards entered the library, Gray was hunching his shoulders to settle more firmly the collar of his coat.

His greeting to the two men was formal, slightly frigid. He merely nodded his head to Richards—with no light of recognition in his eyes; he said good morning to Lawton as he might have said "drive on" to his coachman. When he had motioned them to chairs he sank into one at his desk and looked inquiringly at Lawton.

"Well, sir; you have honored me with a very early call. What can I do for you?"

Lawton's eyes were pools of cold contempt. He got up, walked to the door, closed it, and returned to his chair.

"We don't want to be interrupted, Gray," he said. "This is real business." He reached into a hip-pocket and drew out a huge pistol, holding it, unaimed, in the palm of his right hand.

Richards watched him, his face expressionless. Gray started, half rose from his chair, and then sat down again, his face pale, a gleam of fear in his eyes.

"Steady, Gray," warned Lawton as he saw Gray's right hand fall to the desk-top and begin to slide along it. "I remarked that this is real business, and I mean it. Keep your hands away from that button, or I'll bore you so quick it will make you dizzy! We're here to ask you some questions; and they are going to be answered. But, now that I've arranged the preliminaries, I'll let Richards do the talking." He jerked a thumb toward his companion.

"Richards!"

Gray peered hard at the other, who looked steadily back at him. And when Gray's eyes began to glow with recognition, Lawton laughed shortly, mirthlessly.

"Minus his beard, but still Richards—undeniably Richards—Jay Richards." Lawton grinned into Gray's eyes, now fixed upon the silent Richards with a sort of fixed, vacuous incredulity.

After Lawton had closed the door and drawn the pistol there had come into the atmosphere of the room a perceptible, even

palpable tension—as though tragedy, grim-visaged, was lurking near. At Lawton's words there came a deepening of the tension; the atmosphere of the room became pregnant with the promise of violence, imminent and deadly.

Richards's face was set; his jaws were sheathed with muscles that stood out in rigid bunches; his eyes were glittering pin-points of implacable determination.

And now, as Gray watched him, his lips moved.

"I'm Jay Richards, Gray. For the last few weeks folks have been calling me 'Sayle.' You've guessed it," he added grimly when he saw Gray's eyes widen. "For the past few weeks I've been known as Sayle, of the McGrail Detective Agency."

Gray squirmed and drew a long breath. He essayed a smile, which had a frozen, satiric humor concealed somewhere in it.

"You do not expect me to believe that?" he said coldly.

"That's unimportant, Gray. Believe it or not. I've known for a long time that McGrail did a lot of underground work for you. In fact, I happened to have something on McGrail that made him eager to take me into his confidence when I questioned him about you. He told me some months ago that you had intimated to him that one day you would want him for some work connected with myself. So I determined to be prepared. McGrail told me he'd always done your work.

"So I made it worth McGrail's while to get out of the detective game—in New York, at least. He got out. I took over the New York office. You know that McGrail never employed any men—he did the work himself. My taking over the office was simple.

"I put a girl there. She did nothing except sit there and wait for you to send in a call for McGrail. The call came. The girl called herself Barbara Alden. Her real name is Ella Richards—my daughter."

Both Lawton and Richards watched Gray intently as Richards revealed the identity of Barbara Alden, both being aware that Hamlin, in the rôle of John Hammond, had mentioned the name Alden to the financier.

Gray's sudden start betrayed his amaze-

ment at the revelation; and Lawton and Richards exchanged disappointed glances. They had thought Gray had learned of the deception; his emotion showed that he had not.

"We sent a man here in reply to your request," Richards went on. "A man named John Hammond. He discovered, by bluffing you a little, that you were concerned in preventing me from attending a certain directors' meeting on the fifteenth—which, by the way, is to-morrow. It may interest you to know that John Hammond's real name is Lane Hamlin."

Gray took the blow well. His face was expressionless, inscrutable. The shadow of a cold smile lurked around the corners of his mouth as he watched the other men.

"Interesting, gentlemen—very interesting, I am sure. But suppose I plead guilty to a concern for your whereabouts on the fifteenth of the month? What then? I assure you I do not feel at all conscience-stricken. It is all a part of the game, isn't it? It has been done, and will be done again. I found that it would be to my advantage to keep you from attending a meeting of certain directors. I tried—I failed. What are you going to do about it?"

Gray's defiant, almost contemptuous manner seemed to make Richards's jaws clamp a little tighter. He drew from a pocket the pistol he had attempted to use on Hamlin. He trained its dark muzzle on Gray, and his stiffened wrist and steady blazing eyes told of the deadliness of his intentions.

"I'm going to do this about it, Gray," he said, his voice vibrating with passion. "Last night your friend Morrell abducted my daughter. I'm going to give you one minute to tell where he took her!"

There was no defiance or contempt in the startled glance that Gray now threw at Richards. In his manner—in the way his hands gripped the arms of his chair; in the way he stared from one to the other of his two visitors, was nothing but astonishment, naked and sincere.

"Great Heaven, men!" he ejaculated. "You don't mean to insinuate that I would have anything to do with a crime like that? Richards, for Heaven's sake don't look at

me like that! Wait! Put that gun down—it might go off! Listen!”

He got out of his chair and stood before Richards. His face was ghastly, but there was an eager sincerity in his manner that was convincing.

Richards looked at Lawton; then slowly replaced the weapon.

“Gentlemen,” said Gray, “I admit I have-sometimes indulged in sharp practise. But the thing you speak of is out of my line. I am going to tell you all I know of the case—about Morrell, that is.

“Morrell has done some work for me, from time to time. It has been in the nature of espionage—nothing more. If he has committed any crimes it was not with my knowledge or consent. If Morrell has done so he has done it on his own initiative.

“He was here one day, not long ago—the day your man Hammond—Hamlin—came. He had previously mentioned you and Miss Richards. He seemed to have a private grudge against the young woman and yourself. But I never inquired into it. I was not interested.

“But on that day he seemed to feel especially vicious. He spoke of your owing him money. If I remember, he threatened Miss Richards. I thought he was merely ranting and did not pay much attention to his talk. Believe me, gentlemen, I have no further knowledge of the affair.”

Gray’s manner was convincing. Lawton and Richards exchanged glances. Lawton nodded his head a quarter of an inch, thus indicating that he accepted Gray’s declaration of innocence.

Both men got up. Into Richards’s eyes had come again the expression of haunting anxiety.

“Gray,” he said, “don’t bother me any more about that directors’ meeting. I believe what you’ve said about not knowing anything about this abduction. I’m apologizing to you. But I warn you that I’m going to attend that meeting, and if you do anything to keep me from doing so—if you try any monkey business—I’m coming back here and shoot you so full of holes that you’ll look like a sieve. Just remember that when you’re pulling off some of your damned plotting!”

Lawton and Richards walked down the stairs and out into the street.

“That settles it,” declared Richards as they walked to the waiting taxi. “Gray was telling the truth. Morrell is working his private grudge. I’m going to turn this thing over to the police.”

CHAPTER XX.

DOUBLE-CROSSED.

FOR many minutes Hamlin stood near the center of the room in the Richards residence, watching Frayne.

The man was still on the floor near the wall, muttering and gibbering, his right arm outflung, his head resting on it; the left hand pressed to his face, where Hamlin had hit him.

Silent, remorseless, implacable, Hamlin continued to watch, and Frayne made no movement. It was evident, he knew, that to get up again would mean that the question: “Where did Morrell take Barbara Alden?” would issue from the lips of his merciless inquisitor, to be followed by more punishment—if he refused to answer.

And Frayne was beginning to believe that in the end he must answer. He knew where Morrell had taken Barbara Alden—though Morrell had not told him that Barbara Alden was in reality Miss Richards. Morrell had not taken Frayne fully into his confidence. But Frayne knew that to divulge the whereabouts of Barbara Alden would constitute an act of disloyalty to Morrell—and he dreaded Morrell’s rage more than he feared punishment at Hamlin’s hands.

However, the punishment he had already received had gone a long way toward breaking his spirit; and when at last he raised his head it was to look at Hamlin with a consciousness of the futility of attempting to deny him.

Frayne sat up, his back to the wall, and glared with mingled hate and terror at Hamlin, who was watching him, his jaws set like a steel trap. Frayne’s eyes dropped from Hamlin’s; they glowed with cunning.

He began to get up. He slid up the

wall, his arms hanging limply, as though advertising his complete subjugation; his chin was on his chest; his mouth was open, his eyes closed.

Hamlin stepped toward him, halting within arm's length.

"Frayne, where did Morrell take Barbara Alden?"

Frayne lifted his head; his eyes were furtive, shifting, fearful. He threw up one hand as though to guard against the blow he expected.

"Don't hit me again," he whined; "I'll tell you."

"Where?"

"Morrell will kill me," muttered Frayne. "But I can't stand any more of this. She's in a room above the Dragon."

Frayne heard Hamlin's breath shrill into his lungs. He watched with furtive interest while Hamlin put on his coat and hat, moving swiftly, saying nothing.

"Come on," Hamlin ordered shortly. "You're going to show me exactly where Morrell took her." He walked over and seized Frayne by an arm; his grip was so vicious that he half lifted Frayne off the floor. His voice was cold, sharp, menacing.

"Wipe the blood off your face—quick, you miserable whelp! And listen to this: If you raise your voice above a whisper while we're going to the Dragon—if you make a motion that looks like you are signaling for assistance—I'll kill you as sure as my name is Hamlin."

A few minutes later they descended the stairs, Frayne in the lead, Hamlin close behind him. When they reached the lower hallway Labrue met them, opened the door. As Hamlin passed Labrue whispered:

"I couldn't done a better job myself. I heard you giving it to him. What was it you was saying about Barbara Alden being abducted? Does Mr. Sayle know about it!"

"Damn Sayle!" muttered Hamlin vindictively.

Before Labrue could complete his astonished exclamation Hamlin had reached the sidewalk, shoving Frayne ahead of him.

At the next corner Hamlin hailed a

passing taxi, marked vacant. If Frayne's appearance attracted attention, Hamlin paid no attention; he hustled the man into the taxi, slammed the door, jumped in beside Frayne, and called to the driver to "make time" to the Dragon.

In the rush of early morning traffic the vehicle attracted little attention. Hamlin's time was occupied in watching Frayne with malicious interest and in wondering over Barbara's treatment by Morrell.

Hamlin was still in the clutch of the savage passion that had seized him with the realization that Morrell had dared to do what he had done; and each foot of the taxi's progress toward the Dragon added something to his determination to make Morrell pay amply for the outrage.

The taxi reached lower Broadway at last, slipped into a side street, away from the traffic jams that had retarded its speed; veered when it reached another corner; bobbed for a short distance over cobblestones, and came to a sudden stop at the curb in front of the Dragon.

Hamlin paid the driver, seized Frayne by an arm, and led him through the outside door—into the narrow hall in which he had made his last stand, when he had floored the silken-clad knife-bearer.

Frayne was still silent. He had said no word during the ride, sitting back on the seat, pressing a handkerchief to his macerated lips. He said no word now as he and Hamlin stood before the closed door—the inside door where the last phase of the fight had come—where the bodies of men had lain as proof of Hamlin's terrific punishing ability.

"You know how to get in," suggested Hamlin coldly.

Frayne knocked peculiarly on the door. After an instant a slide came open and the slitlike eyes of an inmate looked out, examined both men with deliberation, and vanished. Then slowly the door swung back, Frayne and Hamlin stepped in, and the door was closed behind them by the owner of the slit eyes.

The change from the clear white daylight to the hazy radiance of the interior of the Dragon caused Hamlin's eyes involuntarily to blink; and while he stood for

an instant, getting his vision accustomed to the subdued light, he seized Frayne by an arm, so that the latter could not get away from him.

When at last he could see with comparative clearness he noted that the room was in almost the same condition as when he had entered it on the occasion of his first visit. New lanterns had been swung from the ceiling, and the furniture he had wrecked had been replaced. Several inmates of the place were watching him. Hamlin had an uncomfortable conviction that the eyes of every person in the room were upon him, with that peculiar, venomous hostility he had noticed after he had struck Morrell and the inmates had all seemed—by their actions, at least—to be eager to destroy him.

As on the occasion of his previous visit, there were lax figures on bunks and couches that fringed the walls; the same odors assailed his nostrils; he felt the same nauseating weakness.

"Wong!" called Frayne weakly.

From out of the haze at the rear of the room a silken-clad figure appeared, crossing the room with the mincing stride peculiar to his race. As the Chinaman came closer, Hamlin saw that he carried himself with an air of authority; that he was a big man, with keen, piercing eyes. He halted within a few feet of Frayne and Hamlin and regarded them with a bland, smooth smile.

"Mr. Flayne," he greeted in a squeaky, high-pitched voice. "What you wantee?"

Frayne grinned evilly. As his eyes met those of the Chinaman he deliberately gave a wink.

"My friend, Mr. Hamlin," he said loudly, so that Hamlin had a swift divination that Frayne was purposely attracting the attention of the inmates of the place to him. But Hamlin had considered the danger of entering the Dragon. According to the story told the reporters regarding the knifing of the inmate during the fight, there was no doubt that they blamed him. But Miss Alden was a prisoner in a room up-stairs—if Frayne had not lied—and before Hamlin had left Miss Larrabee's room he had dropped Frayne's pistol into

a pocket, anticipating opposition to his attempt to rescue Miss Alden.

However, Hamlin meant to rescue her. He had come into the Dragon with his eyes wide open—with a conception of the hazards that would confront him. And he meant to rescue Miss Alden if he had to kill Frayne, Morrell, and a dozen inmates of the place.

He had not seen Frayne's eye close at Wong. Wong had evidently noticed, however, for his smile widened as he looked at Frayne.

"Hamlin," he said smoothly. "Muchee fight—eh?" He did not seem to be particularly interested in Hamlin. He turned to Frayne.

"What you wantee, Mr. Flayne?"

"The girl that Morrell brought," answered Frayne. "Where is she? Up-stairs—eh?"

There was an infinitesimal pause, seemingly significant of nothing but that Wong was slowly digesting the question and debating the advisability of evading an answer. His narrowed, slitlike eyes were gleaming like a bird's, indicating lively mental action; but they held no more expression than the eyes of a dead fish.

Frayne winked again; and again Hamlin was ignorant of the action.

And now Wong's smile expanded.

"She up-stairs. Mr. Morrell not there. Mr. Hamlin wantee see?"

Hamlin nodded. He had noted a concerted movement on the part of the inmates; how they had seemed to be interested in the conversation, and how they were slowly edging toward Wong, Frayne, and himself.

He had decided that Miss Alden was really up-stairs, and he was determined that if the Chinaman opposed a search of the upper floor he would make a search in spite of him.

However, Wong's mild quiescence promised a peaceful adventure; and Wong's admission that Barbara was where Frayne had said she could be found indicated that nothing of a shocking nature had happened to her.

Still smiling his bland smile, Wong led the way to the door through which Hamlin

and Frayne had entered. When he reached the narrow hall he paused, took a key from a pocket reached through a slit in the folds of the silken garment he wore, and inserted it in the lock of the door which led—Hamlin supposed—to the second story of the building.

Wong's movements were deliberate, and his smile endured through the process of unlocking the door and swinging it open. And as the opening of the door disclosed a flight of dirty stairs that led up to a landing, Hamlin was inclined to think that Wong meditated no trickery.

However, he waited until Wong started up the stairs. Then, pushing Frayne ahead of him, he followed Wong. Wong clattered to the top of the stairs, and stood there smilingly watching Frayne and Hamlin ascend. When the two reached his side Wong wobbled down a long hall, lighted dimly by a solitary lantern at the rear. The lantern had evidently been placed where it was to light another flight of stairs that ran from the rear end of the hallway.

Still smiling, Wong halted before another door in the hall, inserted a key, and swung the door open, standing aside to permit Hamlin and Frayne to enter.

At the instant he passed Wong, shoving Frayne ahead of him, Hamlin saw Wong's smile change. It became ironic, mocking, triumphant. Hamlin, sensing trickery, wheeled and leaped toward the Chinaman. But the door was slammed in his face. Hamlin threw his weight against it; succeeded in forcing it open a trifle—enough so that he caught sight of half a dozen yellow faces in the crevice.

For an instant he stood, realizing that he had been trapped, but still half believing that Miss Alden was in the building. He turned from the door, ducking as a shadow moved somewhere in the room, to escape a heavy chair in the hands of Frayne. The chair struck the door at a point where Hamlin's head had been an instant before, slipped out of Frayne's grasp, and crashed to the floor at Hamlin's feet.

Frayne's face was set with malignance. When he observed the failure of his attack

with the chair he cursed bitterly and leaped at Hamlin, striking savagely. Hamlin did not retreat an inch. He met Frayne's rush with half a dozen short, jolting punches that caused Frayne's eyes to glaze; and rocked his head back and forth on his shoulders. A last blow sent Frayne down near the wall opposite the door through which both men had entered; and Hamlin, aware that he and Frayne were alone in the room, looked sharply at the fallen man, and then took a swift glance around him.

The floor was bare, the walls undecorated. There was no furniture except the chair Frayne had used in his attack, and a disreputable-looking bed in a rear corner. There were two windows in the front, both boarded up—Hamlin could see hinges, padlocks, indicating that the boards were formed into doors, locked securely.

At the rear of the room was another door, and in the wall near where Frayne was lying still another. Hamlin, judging from the width of the room he was in, and comparing it with the lower floor of the Dragon, was convinced that this door was in an outside wall of the building and that it connected the room in which he was standing with a room of the adjoining building—perhaps in another day one tenant had occupied both structures.

However, the door was not at present utilized as a means of communication, for it was tightly closed and there was affixed a huge hasp swung from massive staples, with a gigantic padlock, rusty from disuse.

Hamlin tried the door, however, hoping. It did not give an inch to his shove. He left it, went to the rear door, tried that. It, too, was locked.

Hamlin returned to where Frayne lay. He stood silent, watching the man regain consciousness. When at last Frayne got to his feet, it was Hamlin's hands that helped him. He dragged Frayne to the chair and set him into it. Then he drew out Frayne's gun, stuck its muzzle against the man's chest, and held it there with vicious pressure.

"Frayne," he said, his voice vibrating with earnestness, "you've tricked me.

I've slugged you enough. You don't seem to think that I am serious about this thing. I'm going to prove that I am. You tell me where I can find Barbara Alden or I'll kill you!"

Frayne looked up at him dazedly. A terror that Hamlin had not seen in his face before was in it now. But his terror was not of the gun that Hamlin held in his hand.

He twisted his head and looked at the door through which he and Hamlin had entered. He gulped, choked, then said, his voice shaking:

"Wong double-crossed me. Something's up. I—I thought he was too damned polite. Wong knows—I tell you he knows! They blamed you for knifing that Chink—the night you busted up the place. And all the time they knowed I done it—they must have seen me—the damned, yellow-faced hypocrites! Didn't you see the way Wong looked at me when we came in the door? I saw you. You thought he was meaning you, but I tell you he meant me, Hamlin—me! He's sent for me a dozen times since that night. Now I know what for!"

He looked into Hamlin's eyes—the look of a cornered animal, sensing the imminence of death.

"Sure, I'll tell you now. Why shouldn't I? What in the hell has Morrell ever done for me? Got me into this mess—telling me to knife the Chink that night so's it would be blamed onto you. He's out of it—kidnaping girls. Soft—eh? Well, I'm telling you. He took her to a shack down on Eighth Avenue—off it a little piece—between Eighteenth and Nineteenth. There's an alley leading to it from Seventh. It's at the end of that. You get in from an area-way at the end of the alley, turning to your right into a door that leads into a hall. It used to be an old house—Seeley Gray owned it. He left one room furnished—Morrell says he and some more fellows used to hang out there.

"You can't miss it. There's a Chink joint on one corner of the alley and a wop fruit-store on the other. The room where Morrell's got the Alden girl is on

the top floor, at the head of the stairs that you have got to go up—at the end of the lower hall."

"How did he get her there?" Hamlin was suspicious.

"He's got a friend working in the Highland. He had it fixed up with the guy to have the freight elevator at Miss Alden's floor last night. He got into Miss Alden's room, chloroformed her, and took her down to the basement of the Highland in the freight elevator. I was outside, with a car I had hired. I drove them both to the room, and left them there. That gets you, eh?" he ended when he saw Hamlin give him a startled look.

Hamlin was convinced that Frayne was telling the truth; and the man's explanation of the method Morrell had used in getting Barbara Alden out of the hotel was plausible, and explained why both Morrell and Miss Alden had so quickly disappeared after Morrell had taken her out of her room.

Hamlin stood erect. He put the pistol into a pocket, and, facing the front of the room, examined the locks on the windows. Frayne, sitting dejectedly in the chair, watched him.

Finishing his inspection, Hamlin started to turn. He heard a slight sound behind him; heard Frayne's voice—a muffled shriek. He wheeled—an instant too late—his right hand flashing toward the pistol. The room seemed to be full of yellow-faced men, and there were more coming through the rear door.

He saw all of this in a flash—before his hand had reached the pistol—even before he had fully turned to meet the danger that had stolen upon him.

He remembered ceasing his efforts to get the pistol out, realizing that he would not have room to use it. He had brought his shoulders around, wrenching himself free from a dozen clutching hands that came at him from all directions; and had driven his fists into the faces that were nearest him, when some heavy object thudded against his head. After that, for an interminable time, he seemed to be drifting in space that was black and endless.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

Assisted By

Amiable Amos

by T. F. T. West

TRUE to the tradition of his kind, a creature of habit, Amiable Amos made his morning call promptly at half past nine. At that hour he appeared on the fire-escape balcony and signified that Stanley Ray should open the window. Granted admittance, Amos sat himself on Ray's desk and fixed wide, yellow eyes on the red-haired, youngish man who was opening mail. All this was according to program established for more than two months.

At nine thirty, Stanley Ray, something of a creature of habit himself, returned from breakfast, bringing a trifling present of liver scraps for Amos. This had been going on almost since their first meeting. It had become a gentleman's agreement.

For all his red hair and traces of freckles, Stanley Ray had a pleasant if pugnacious sort of face and a twinkling brown eye. He was not older than thirty.

His friend Amiable Amos possessed a beautiful, clear-gray complexion without a blemish, sported spreading, old-fashioned sideburns like a doctor of the old school, and waved a long and graceful tail.

Stanley Ray wore a well-tailored business suit of fashionable brown; Amos was clad in a well-fitting collar that had riveted to it a small brass plate. The plate was inscribed "Property of Miss H. W., Apt. 5A, the Grandonquin."

Stanley Ray had never met Miss H. W., but he had seen her through her window across the court from his own. He believed that to see her once was enough to wreck the happiness of the most confirmed married man. But he was not even married, and he had seen her a dozen times. He had looked and leaped—leaped head over heels in love.

By every device possible to a well-mannered young man he had tried to win her acquaintance, and so far he got no farther than Amos. Amos called every morning, but Stanley Ray could find no excuse for returning the calls.

So matters stood when a red-faced, heavy jowled man with a nasty blue eye adroitly slipped a master key into the door of Ray's apartment, let himself in with a step as velvety as Amos's, and suddenly confronted the young man at the desk.

Amos saw the intruder first. He rose and arched his back with distaste. His action caused Stanley Ray to look up from his papers, and the eyes of the two men met in a lingering stare, full of hostility.

Stanley Ray's lips twisted finally into a hard smile. He said dryly:

"Pray make yourself at home—since you're already inside. That was my error in leaving the chain off the door—"

"Your name's Ray." Dooling did not ask it; he accused.

"Right. I don't think I've had the pleasure of hearing yours—"

"Stanley Ray?"

"Right again."

Dooling consulted a wrinkled slip of paper. "Own motor vehicle bearing license plates 198-845?"

"Wonderful guesser!"

"Then you're pinched, Mr. Stanley Ray—under arrest for leaving your machine parked on the wrong side of the street in Long Island City from the hours of 3.15 P.M. to 5.25 P.M. yesterday, to wit: November 11, 1920. You'll have to come along with me and tell it to the judge."

"And still you haven't said who you are."

"Name's Dooling, special deputy for the Long Island Citizens' Association. Deputy sheriff, too. Here's my badge; see?"

Ray's face underwent a slight change, like the first thickening of ice over a pond. His voice grated unpleasantly. He said:

"Your name may be Dooling; and you *may* be all the other things you say, but I can tell you some more things you are, Dooling. You are Mr. Dooling, of Birds's International Detective Agency, and you were sent here to get me into trouble, weren't you? One excuse was good as another, so long as you put me under arrest, eh?"

"I don't know nothing about that," Dooling answered, growing redder. "All I know is—"

"But I know! I know even who hired Birds to send you around here to make me trouble. I know what I'm wanted for, Dooling, and it isn't parking my car on the wrong side of the street either! Now, suppose we talk business?"

Ray drew a wallet from his pocket and slowly unfolded a yellow-backed bill. Dooling's eyes went to the bill and remained glued there. Watching his face, Ray slowly added another bill to the first, then a third. His raised eyebrows asked a question.

At the question Dooling came out of his trance.

"Nothing doin'," he growled. "I got my orders. Put up your jack—"

"Look, Dooling, five of 'em—five pretty yellow-backs. Eh?"

"Naw! I'm gettin' paid by the agency—I mean by the Citizens' Association. I don't know what they want you for, and I don't care. My orders is to take you before a judge and make my complaint, and you got to come. Put that poise away; you can't buy me!"

Ray rose and crossed to the dresser.

"Come away from that!" Dooling advanced threateningly. One hand was in his coat-pocket, and the pocket bulged with something more deadly than fist.

"All I want's a clean handkerchief before I go—"

"Allow me!" Dooling jerked open the drawer, rummaged skilfully, and drew out a pistol. "Pretty handkerchief," he sneered. "Guess I'd better charge a Sullivan law violation, too!"

"You're a smart chap, Dooling," Ray smiled, losing gracefully.

"Smart enough for you, young fellow. Now you might's well be reasonable and come along with me. You got to come, you know, and I don't want to have to cuff you or anythin'—"

"Well, you're not in any hurry, are you? You don't mind if I finish this letter and mail it as we go?"

"All the time you want, kid!"

Ray smiled and said, "I thought so." He handed Dooling a cigar and sat again at his desk.

Amiable Amos came reluctantly from behind a couch, made a wide circle around Dooling in a manner that was a neatly pointed insult, and perched himself close beside Stanley Ray's elbow. Ray wrote rapidly, and Amos, fascinated by his busy fingers, stretched forth a paw and tapped his pen. Ray smiled.

He addressed an envelope at length, sealed his letter in it, and handed it to the red-faced detective.

"You mail it," he suggested. "It clears me of any suspicion, you see."

In his overcoat and hat, Ray signified his readiness to accompany his companion, but at the door he stopped.

"Mind if I put out the cat? Might be gone a long time, you know, Dooling—"

"Hell, no! Anythin' to oblige, buddy."

When the young man raised the window and assisted Amos to an exit, Dooling moved suddenly upon him, to be met with a laugh.

"Don't worry; I'm not going to slide down the fire-escape," said Ray; and at the door he paused again. "Oh, just one thing more, old man. I want to write a note for the hall boy—to have my mail attended to. You don't mind?"

"Say, you must be expecting to be put away for a long time, kid!"

"Well," Ray smiled, "when a man's accused of murder—"

"Murder!" Dooling's blue eyes bulged. "Is that what they want—"

"I said *when* a man is accused, Dooling."

"Kiddin' me, are you! Well, cut this stallin' short; I'm gettin' tired—"

Ray assured him he would be ready in a minute now, and he was—within five minutes.

At the elevator a young woman joined them a little breathlessly. She was dressed for the streets and seemed hurried. Her cheeks were very pink and her eyes bright.

"Helen!" Ray exclaimed.

"Why, Stanley!"

Ray took the detective by the arm.

"My friend Mr. Dooling," he said ceremoniously. "This is my sister I've spoken about, Mr. Dooling."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance," declared Mr. Dooling, playing up like a true gentleman, albeit a very red one.

"Mr. Dooling and I were just going out—on business," Ray explained as they rode down in the elevator.

The young lady smiled and said, "Indeed?"

Her eyes met Stanley Ray's, and the glance they exchanged was significant of a great many unspoken things. She blushed a little more, as if she guessed some of the things Ray was thinking.

The hall of the Grandonquin Apartments is quite an ornate affair, full of marble and red carpets and leaded glass and uncomfortable period chairs. There is a cigar stand and a desk for the uni-

formed colored boy, clerk, and glass telephone booths.

The colored boy stopped the trio as they passed his desk.

"Mistah Ray, suh, is they a Mistah Dooling in your apahment?"

"This is Mr. Dooling, Percy."

"Telephone call foh you, Mistah Dooling. Pahty wants you to phome the office right off, suh."

"Hell!" said Dooling. "Sure about that, boy?"

Percy was emphatically sure. Dooling hesitated.

"There's a phone booth just behind those pillars," the young woman suggested helpfully.

"And we'll wait for you right outside," Ray added.

Dooling's face cleared when he saw the booth was of glass. He lifted the telephone receiver from its hook and gave his number, leaving the door open. When the connection was made he gave a final glance about to be sure his prisoner was at hand. Then, assured that Stanley Ray was deeply engrossed in the young woman he called sister, Dooling pulled to the folding door. The pair outside became suddenly active at Dooling's first low-voiced, cautious, "This is Dooling, Terry."

From her hair the young woman snatched a long, dagger-shaped pin with an ornamental head, and, stooping, slipped it into the crack of the phone booth door. Then she and Ray hurried away together, slowing their pace as they passed out of the imposing entrance to the Grandonquin.

Once outside, Ray seized her arm and hurried her to a motor-car. She was swept to a seat and the car left the curb with a flying leap.

Cross-town a couple of blocks, around a corner into a wide, one-way street, and so, like the wind, southward.

The young woman laughed mischievously. "Old Mr. Snodgrass, one of the tenants, was in that booth half an hour the other night, kicking and swearing terribly before anybody heard him," she confided to Dooling. "The door is a little out of order. It gets stuck fast—and that pin will jam it faster."

"Then why all this hurry?" Stanley Ray demanded, slowing the car to a more law-abiding pace. He turned on his companion. His brown eyes glowed. "Miss H. W.," he declared earnestly, "I want to say here and now that you're a brick! There isn't one girl in a million—not one in a hundred million—would come to a fellow's assistance the way you did!"

"Oh, that!" Miss H. W. laughed. "I hope it wasn't anything very terrible he arrested you for," she added with a look that invited confidence.

Ray swept on, ignoring the question:

"Of course, I've never been introduced to you. I only knew your name from the hall boy. But I've seen you at your window and—well, you looked like—like the sort of girl you are. And I was very well acquainted with your cat. So I took a long chance—took the liberty to slip that note under his collar in the desperate hope you would come to my rescue."

"That was a lark!" Miss H. W. declared.

"But I never dreamed you were so quick—so clever! Why, you managed it skilfully. You must have telephoned ahead to Percy to give Dooling that message."

"Yes. I remembered Mr. Snodgrass getting stuck in the booth the other night. And now, don't you think"—the girl turned on him more seriously, her eyes searching his face—"don't you think if there is an explanation that you'd better tell me—and let me out. I must be getting back, you know."

"Look here," said Stanley Ray, very serious himself, "you took me on faith—a total stranger. You've trusted me so far. I'm going to press my luck a little further. I've almost reached where I'm bound for, the Cuyler Building on Twenty-Third, and I have some business there that cannot wait."

"Miss H. W., I'm going to ask you to trust me a little longer. I'm going to ask you, if you want to make me very happy, to wait for me in the car for about half an hour. Then I want to take you to lunch."

"Well, really—"

"Please! Please let me. Why, we—we're sort of partners in crime now. We

—we ought to stick together—and listen, I'll tell you what it's all about if you'll wait that long for me."

As he spoke Ray swept the car close to the curb and stopped before the Cuyler Building. He added an impulsive, pleading "You will—won't you?"

Miss H. W., looking rather serious, nodded slowly.

With her nod Ray had gone, plunging into the doorway of the office building. A half-hour can be a very long time under certain conditions. The young woman in the car had never known a longer one, and at the end of the half-hour Stanley Ray had not returned.

She reproached herself for a rash act; she became worried, alarmed, frightened as the minutes dragged. Never in her life had she done such a thing as this, never! She was a conservative thinking and acting daughter of a conservative family. Her profession was gathering confidential credit reports, a most conservative business. She knew few people intimately and none not properly introduced and vouched for. She was very particular, and yet, on a minute's notice, she had gone to the rescue of a perfect stranger—a stranger except for the fact that she had seen him at his window and liked his looks!

She had rescued him the moment her cat brought her his note of appeal, tucked under its collar—helped him foil a detective—possibly incriminated herself!

And why? She did not know—except he had been kind to her cat. A fine introduction, that! Yes, a conservative of conservatives, she had done something the most headstrong, foolish woman would blush to do. She felt her cheeks redden painfully. And for all she knew the man was a criminal—the very type to prove a slick swindler—and she sat confidently awaiting his return. Probably he would never return. She had read of such things. Perhaps the very car she sat in was stolen.

A business man she knew stopped at the curb and spoke to her. She explained to him that she was waiting there for a friend.

What if the car was stolen? If this man was a crook? What if it was published in the newspapers, with her name involved?

She rose hastily, intent on running from ruin—and reluctantly she sat down again. She had given him her promise. And at that moment Ray came hurrying from the building, smiling broadly.

"Now," he said, "for the explanation." They faced each other across a little table in a quiet hotel dining-room. He passed her a legal-looking paper. "I want you to know I'm not a crook—and here's the proof."

"Why, it's a deed—a property deed," she said slowly. Her eyes widened farther. "A deed—to the Grandonquin! You own it?"

"Since eleven forty-five this morning," he smiled. "It's very simple. Three months ago I saw a chance to buy the Grandonquin at a good figure. I thought I knew where to get the capital, and I spent all my own money on an option—an option that expired at noon to-day. But my backers failed me."

"Then the Grandonquin people got a better offer—and they saw the chance they were missing, the big profits in high rents that are coming, and they did everything in their power to prevent my buying. When everything else failed and finally I got the money I needed they employed the dirtiest trick of all, hired a private detective to keep me in trouble and out of the way until this option expired. You understand that?"

She nodded.

"But we beat 'em," Ray gloated suddenly. "Oh, boy! And I want to say right now that no matter what may happen to other rents at the Grandonquin, I want you to consider that place your home. And you can pay any rent you please, you and your cat, any rent or no rent at all. Thanks to you and Amiable Amos—"

"Who?"

"Amiable Amos. I mean your cat. You see, that's the name I gave him. Sort of fitted—"

"But it doesn't fit!"

"No!"

"No, indeed. Why, my cat's name is Venus. Amos, indeed! She's not that kind of cat."

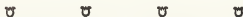
"Venus!"

"Venus."

Stanley Ray spoke with a solemn tremulousness, standing abashed before a great idea. "Why—why, look here. You know who Venus was? Venus, why she was the goddess of love!"

Miss H. W. looked startled, too. Her cheeks were very pink, and she breathed faster. She said slowly: "Yes—yes. I believe she was."

At this discovery they were silent together, silent for a long time. For them it seemed to hold a tremendous significance.



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